



HONEYMOON (1923)

By Katherine Mansfield

And when they came out of the lace shop there was their own driver and the cab they called their own cab waiting for them under a plane tree. What luck! Wasn't it luck? Fanny pressed her husband's arm. These things seemed always to be happening to them ever since they—came abroad. Didn't he think so too? But George stood on the pavement edge, lifted his stick, and gave a loud "Hi!" Fanny sometimes felt a little uncomfortable about the way George summoned cabs, but the drivers didn't seem to mind, so it must have been all right. Fat, good-natured, and smiling, they stuffed away the little newspaper they were reading, whipped the cotton cover off the horse, and were ready to obey.

"I say," George said as he helped Fanny in, "suppose we go and have tea at the place where the lobsters grow. Would you like to?"

"Most awfully," said Fanny, fervently, as she leaned back wondering why the way George put things made them sound so very nice.

"R-right, bien." He was beside her. "Allay" he cried gaily, and off they went.

Off they went, spanking along lightly, under the green and gold shade of the plane trees, through the small streets that smelled of lemons and fresh coffee, past the fountain square where women, with water-pots lifted, stopped talking to gaze after them, round the corner past the café, with its pink and white umbrellas, green tables, and blue siphons, and so to the sea front. There a wind, light, warm, came flowing over the boundless sea. It touched George, and Fanny it seemed to linger over while they gazed at the dazzling water. And George said, "Jolly, isn't it?" And Fanny, looking dreamy, said, as she said at least twenty times a day since they—came abroad: "Isn't it extraordinary to think that here we are quite alone, away from everybody, with nobody to tell us to go home, or to—to order us about except ourselves?"

George had long since given up answering "Extraordinary!" As a rule he merely kissed her. But now he caught hold of her hand, stuffed it into his pocket, pressed her fingers, and said, "I used to keep a white mouse in my pocket when I was a kid."



“Did you?” said Fanny, who was intensely interested in everything George had ever done. “Were you very fond of white mice?”

“Fairly,” said George, without conviction. He was looking at something, bobbing out there beyond the bathing steps. Suddenly he almost jumped in his seat. “Fanny!” he cried. “There’s a chap out there bathing. Do you see? I’d no idea people had begun. I’ve been missing it all these days.” George glared at the reddened face, the reddened arm, as though he could not look away. “At any rate,” he muttered, “wild horses won’t keep me from going in tomorrow morning.”

Fanny’s heart sank. She had heard for years of the frightful dangers of the Mediterranean. It was an absolute death-trap. Beautiful, treacherous Mediterranean. There it lay curled before them, its white, silky paws touching the stones and gone again. . . . But she’d made up her mind long before she was married that never would she be the kind of woman who interfered with her husband’s pleasures, so all she said was, airily, “I suppose one has to be very up in the currents, doesn’t one?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said George. “People talk an awful lot of rot about the danger.”

But now they were passing a high wall on the land side, covered with flowering heliotrope, and

Fanny’s little nose lifted. “Oh George,” she breathed. “The smell! The most divine . . .”

“Topping villa,” said George. “Look, you can see it through the palms.”

“Isn’t it rather large?” said Fanny, who somehow could not look at any villa except as a possible habitation for herself and George.

“Well, you’d need a crowd of people if you stayed there long,” replied George. “Deadly, otherwise. I say, it is ripping. I wonder who it belongs to.” And he prodded the driver in the back.

The lazy, smiling driver, who had no idea, replied, as he always did on these occasions, that it was the property of a wealthy Spanish family.

“Masses of Spaniards on this coast,” commented George, leaning back again, and they were silent until, as they rounded a bend, the big, bone-white hotel-restaurant came into view. Before it there was a small terrace built up against the sea, planted with umbrella palms, set out with tables, and at their approach, from the terrace, from the hotel, waiters came running to receive, to welcome Fanny and George, to cut them off from any possible kind of escape.

“Outside?”

Oh, but of course they would sit outside. The sleek manager, who was marvellously like a fish in a frock coat, skimmed forward.



“Dis way, sir. Dis way, sir. I have a very nice little table,” he gasped. “Just the little table for you, sir, over in de corner. Dis way.”

So George, looking most dreadfully bored, and Fanny, trying to look as though she’d spent years of life threading her way through strangers, followed after.

“Here you are, sir. Here you will be very nice,” coaxed the manager, taking the vase off the table, and putting it down again as if it were a fresh little bouquet out of the air. But George refused to sit down immediately. He saw through these fellows; he wasn’t going to be done. These chaps were always out to rush you. So he put his hands in his pockets, and said to Fanny, very calmly, “This all right for you? Anywhere else you’d prefer? How about over there?” And he nodded to a table right over the other side.

What it was to be a man of the world! Fanny admired him deeply, but all she wanted to do was to sit down and look like everybody else.

“I—I like this,” said she.

“Right,” said George, hastily, and he sat down almost before Fanny, and said quickly, “Tea for two and chocolate éclairs.”

“Very good, sir,” said the manager, and his mouth opened and shut as though he was ready for another dive under the water. “You will not ’ave toasts to start with? We ’ave very nice toasts, sir.”

“No,” said George, shortly. “You don’t want toast, do you, Fanny?”

“Oh, no, thank you, George,” said Fanny, praying the manager would go.

“Or perhaps de lady might like to look at de live lobsters in de tank while de tea is coming?” And he grimaced and smirked and flicked his serviette like a fin.

George’s face grew stony. He said “No” again, and Fanny bent over the table, unbuttoning her gloves. When she looked up the man was gone. George took off his hat, tossed it on to a chair, and pressed back his hair.

“Thank God,” said he, “that chap’s gone. These foreign fellows bore me stiff. The only way to get rid of them is simply to shut up as you saw I did. Thank Heaven!” sighed George again, with so much emotion that if it hadn’t been ridiculous Fanny might have imagined that he had been as frightened of the manager as she. As it was she felt a rush of love for George. His hands were on the table, brown, large hands that she knew so well. She longed to take one of them and squeeze it hard. But, to her astonishment, George did just that thing. Leaning across the table, he put his hand over hers, and said, without looking at her, “Fanny, darling Fanny.”



“Oh, George!” It was in that heavenly moment that Fanny heard a twing-twing-tootle-tootle, and a light strumming. There’s going to be music, she thought, but the music didn’t matter just then. Nothing mattered except love. Faintly smiling she gazed into that faintly smiling face, and the feeling was so blissful that she felt inclined to say to George, “Let us stay here—where we are—at this little table. It’s perfect, and the sea is perfect. Let us stay.” But instead her eyes grew serious.

“Darling,” said Fanny. “I want to ask you something fearfully important. Promise me you’ll answer. Promise.”

“I promise,” said George, too solemn to be quite as serious as she.

“It’s this.” Fanny paused a moment, looked down, looked up again. “Do you feel,” she said, softly, “that you really know me now? But really, really know me?”

It was too much for George. Know his Fanny? He gave a broad, childish grin. “I should jolly well think I do,” he said, emphatically. “Why, what’s up?”

Fanny felt he hadn’t quite understood. She went on quickly: “What I mean is this. So often people, even when they love each other, don’t seem to—to—it’s so hard to say—know each other perfectly. They don’t seem to want to. And I think that’s awful. They misunderstand each other about the most important things of all.” Fanny looked horrified. “George, we couldn’t do that, could we? We never could.”

“Couldn’t be done,” laughed George, and he was just going to tell her how much he liked her little nose, when the waiter arrived with the tea and the band struck up. It was a flute, a guitar, and a violin, and it played so gaily that Fanny felt if she wasn’t careful even the cups and saucers might grow little wings and fly away. George absorbed three chocolate éclairs, Fanny two. The funny-tasting tea—“Lobster in the kettle,” shouted George above the music—was nice all the same, and when the tray was pushed aside and George was smoking, Fanny felt bold enough to look at the other people. But it was the band grouped under one of the dark trees that fascinated her most. The fat man stroking the guitar was like a picture. The dark man playing the flute kept raising his eyebrows as though he was astonished at the sounds that came from it. The fiddler was in shadow.

The music stopped as suddenly as it had begun. It was then she noticed a tall old man with white hair standing beside the musicians. Strange she hadn’t noticed him before. He wore a very high, glazed collar, a coat green at the seams, and shamefully shabby button boots. Was he another manager? He did not look like a manager, and yet he stood there gazing over the tables as though thinking of something different and far away from all this. Who could he be?

Presently, as Fanny watched him, he touched the points of his collar with his fingers, coughed slightly, and half-turned to the band. It began to play again. Something boisterous, reckless, full of fire, full of passion, was tossed into the air, was tossed to that quiet figure, which clasped its hands, and still with that far-away look, began to sing.



“Good Lord!” said George. It seemed that everybody was equally astonished. Even the little children eating ices stared, with their spoons in the air. . . . Nothing was heard except a thin, faint voice, the memory of a voice singing something in Spanish. It wavered, beat on, touched the high notes, fell again, seemed to implore, to entreat, to beg for something, and then the tune changed, and it was resigned, it bowed down, it knew it was denied.

Almost before the end a little child gave a squeak of laughter, but everybody was smiling—except Fanny and George. Is life like this too? thought Fanny. There are people like this. There is suffering. And she looked at that gorgeous sea, lapping the land as though it loved it, and the sky, bright with the brightness before evening. Had she and George the right to be so happy? Wasn't it cruel? There must be something else in life which made all these things possible. What was it? She turned to George.

But George had been feeling differently from Fanny. The poor old boy's voice was funny in a way, but, God, how it made you realize what a terrific thing it was to be at the beginning of everything, as they were, he and Fanny! George, too, gazed at the bright, breathing water, and his lips opened as if he could drink it. How fine it was! There was nothing like the sea for making a chap feel fit. And there sat Fanny, his Fanny, leaning forward, breathing so gently.

“Fanny!” George called to her.

As she turned to him something in her soft, wondering look made George feel that for two pins he would jump over the table and carry her off.

“I say,” said George, rapidly, “let's go, shall we? Let's go back to the hotel. Come. Do, Fanny darling. Let's go now.”

The band began to play. “Oh, God!” almost groaned George. “Let's go before the old codger begins squawking again.”

And a moment later they were gone.

