

# Katherine Mansfield's 'Bliss'

"Bliss" centers on a thirty-year-old wife and mother named Bertha Young, who is married to Harry and has a baby. She enjoys a happy and comfortable middle-class life with her family. Although she does seem to enjoy it on the surface, we wonder whether she does actually 'enjoy' it as the story continues.

The short story opens with the narrator sharing that Bertha spends her days in a state of delirious happiness and contentment. This raises the question of how much happiness is possible for one individual. Is there a sense of anxiety or something hidden that implies that everything is wrong? Because this is a modernist short story, moments in the lives of the characters allow you to know them better rather than a coherent, action-driven plot.

When Bertha, with her baby and the nanny, is confronted by the nanny forcibly taking hold of the baby, it prevents Bertha from taking charge of the baby.

According to hearsay, Bertha has recently encountered a young, beautiful, and exciting woman named Pearl Fulton. She idolises Pearl and possibly experiences sexual lust for Pearl. Pearl, Bertha and Harry's guest, comes to a dinner party. However, everything in the story happens on this one evening when the story takes place.

The dinner party lets us see the characters as they really are; it is the social conventions of the dinner party which hide their true feelings. It is necessary to use manners; Bertha can only suggest a strong bond between herself and Pearl by referring to the fruit tree in the garden, which Bertha takes to represent the bond between herself and Pearl (curiously enough, the first four letters of Pearl are spelled out).

Bertha watches her husband place Pearl's coat over her shoulders and arrange to meet for a secret rendezvous at the end of the night. At that moment, her world collapses. Pearl is having an affair with Bertha's husband!

Once they get away, Bertha drops into a chair and asks what's going to happen now. Nonetheless, at this moment the narrative comes to an end. As with various modernist storylines, we are left (in the total absence of conclusion) with a query at the conclusion suggests a more life presents us with less confirmation and more queries than we like a simple answer.