



## THIS FLOWER (1920)

By Katherine Mansfield

“But I tell you, my lord fool, out of this nettle danger, we pluck this flower, safety.”

As she lay there, looking up at the ceiling, she had her moment—yes, she had her moment! And it was not connected with anything she had thought or felt before, not even with those words the doctor had scarcely ceased speaking. It was single, glowing, perfect; it was like—a pearl, too flawless to match with another ... Could she describe what happened? Impossible. It was as though, even if she had not been conscious (and she certainly had not been conscious all the time) that she was fighting against the stream of life—the stream of life indeed!— she had suddenly ceased to struggle. Oh, more than that! She had yielded, yielded absolutely, down to every minutest pulse and nerve, and she had fallen into the bright bosom of the stream and it had borne her ... She was part of her room—part of the great bouquet of southern anemones, of the white net curtains that blew in stiff against the light breeze, of the mirrors, the white silky rugs; she was part of the high, shaking, quivering clamour, broken with little bells and crying voices that went streaming by outside,—part of the leaves and the light.

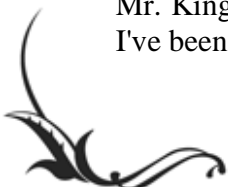
Over. She sat up. The doctor had reappeared. This strange little figure with his stethoscope still strung round his neck—for she had asked him to examine her heart—squeezing and kneading his freshly washed hands, had told her ...

It was the first time she had ever seen him. Roy, unable, of course, to miss the smallest dramatic opportunity, had obtained his rather shady Bloomsbury address from the man in whom he always confided everything, who, although he'd never met her, knew “all about them.”

“My darling,” Roy had said, “we'd better have an absolutely unknown man just in case it's—well, what we don't either of us want it to be. One can't be too careful in affairs of this sort. Doctors *do* talk. It's all damned rot to say they don't.” Then, “Not that I care a straw who on earth knows. Not that I wouldn't—if you'd have me—blazon it on the skies, or take the front page of the *Daily Mirror* and have our two names on it, in a heart, you know — pierced by an arrow.”

Nevertheless, of course, his love of mystery and intrigue, his passion for “keeping our secret beautifully” (his phrase!) had won the day, and off he'd gone in a taxi to fetch this rather sodden-looking little man.

She heard her untroubled voice saying, “Do you mind not mentioning anything of this to Mr. King? If you'd tell him that I'm a little run down and that my heart wants a rest. For I've been complaining about my heart.”



Roy had been really *too* right about the kind of man the doctor was. He gave her a strange, quick, leering look, and taking off the stethoscope with shaking fingers he folded it into his bag that looked somehow like a broken old canvas shoe.

“Don't you worry, my dear,” he said huskily. “I'll see you through.”

Odious little toad to have asked a favour of! She sprang to her feet, and picking up her purple cloth jacket, went over to the mirror. There was a soft knock at the door, and Roy—he really did look pale, smiling his half-smile—came in and asked the doctor what he had to say.

“Well,” said the doctor, taking up his hat, holding it against his chest and beating a tattoo on it, “all I've got to say is that Mrs. —h'm—Madam wants a bit of a rest. She's a bit run down. Her heart's a bit strained. Nothing else wrong.

In the street a barrel-organ struck up something gay, laughing, mocking, gushing, with little trills, shakes, jumbles of notes.

That's *all* I got to say, to say,  
That's all I got to say,

it mocked. It sounded so near she wouldn't have been surprised if the doctor were turning the handle.

She saw Roy's smile deepen; his eyes took fire. He gave a little “Ah!” of relief and happiness. And just for one moment he allowed himself to gaze at her without caring a jot whether the doctor saw or not, drinking her up with that gaze she knew so well, as she stood tying the pale ribbons of her camisole and drawing on the little purple cloth jacket. He jerked back to the doctor, “She shall go away. She shall go away to the sea at once,” said he, and then, terribly anxious, “What about her food?” At that, buttoning her jacket in the long mirror, she couldn't help laughing at him.

“That's all very well,” he protested, laughing back delightedly at her and at the doctor. “But if I didn't manage her food, doctor, she'd never eat anything but caviare sandwiches and—and white grapes. About wine— oughtn't she to have wine?”

Wine would do her no harm.

“Champagne,” pleaded Roy. How he was enjoying himself!

“Oh, as much champagne as she likes,” said the doctor, “and a brandy and soda with her lunch if she fancies it.”

Roy loved that; it tickled him immensely.

“Do you hear that?” he asked solemnly, blinking and sucking in his cheeks to keep from laughing. “Do you fancy a brandy and soda?”



And, in the distance, faint and exhausted, the barrel-organ:

A brandy and so-da,  
A brandy and soda, please!  
A brandy and soda, please!

The doctor seemed to hear that, too. He shook hands with her and Roy went with him into the passage to settle his fee.

She heard the front door close and then— rapid, rapid steps along the passage. This time he simply burst into her room, and she was in his arms, crushed up small while he kissed her with warm quick kisses, murmuring between them, “My darling, my beauty, my delight. You're mine, you're safe.” And then three soft groans. “Oh! Oh! Oh! the relief!” Still keeping his arms round her he leant his head against her shoulder as though exhausted. “If you knew how frightened I've been,” he murmured. “I thought we were in for it this time. I really did. And it would have been so—fatal—so fatal!”

