

Bliss by Katherine Mansfield Part 2

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Level: Advanced

Age: Young adults / Adults

Aims: In this lesson the students will:

1. recall details of the life of the protagonist;
2. listen to a description in order to complete a drawing of a scene from the story;
3. listen for detail to make notes about other characters;
4. practise emphatic stress in double comparatives;
5. arrange a seating plan for a dinner party.

Materials: one copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (an extract from the middle of Part 2), Track 2 (another extract from the middle of Part 2), Track 3 (two long extracts from the beginning and end of Part 2), Track 4 (a short extract) and Track 5 (full audio for Part 2) downloaded from onestopenglish; one copy of the full transcript per student

Summary: Bertha is a woman overcome with happiness because she has everything – a beautiful home and family, wealth and fashionable friends – but is it forever? The story is told in four parts. In Part 2, Bertha and Harry are holding a dinner party and, although their colourful guests are here, Harry hasn't arrived home yet.

Activity 1

Aim: to recap the basics of Bertha's life

1. Ask the students to recall the characters from Part 1 (Bertha, the woman of the house and the main character; Harry, her husband; Little B, their baby daughter; and two domestic servants, Mary and 'Nurse'). Ask the students to share what they remember about Bertha and the type of person she is.

2. Write a sentence (which comes from later in Part 2) on the board:

Really, she had everything.

Ask for one or two ideas from the class as to why Bertha is so happy – that is, what the 'everything' in the quote includes – then put them in pairs to list more possible reasons for her happiness. After a minute, get a few ideas from the class. Explain that they will need their lists later.

Activity 2

Aims: to listen for detail; to provide visual support to help understanding of the symbolism in the description

1. Tell the students that they are going to listen to an extract from Part 2 of the

story. Hand out the worksheet and draw their attention to Activity 1, the sketch of Bertha's drawing room. Explain that it is incomplete and that they should complete the sketch by drawing in the details of the room and the garden according to what they hear. Suggest that they listen first and draw once the audio has finished. Play Track 1. If your students are unused to drawing as an activity, you may want to work through one detail first as an example – elicit one detail from them and show that they should draw it as described.

2. Give the students a chance to compare their drawings, then play Track 1 again to check. Don't confirm the correct answers at this point because students will be given the chance to check them with the transcript at the end of the next activity.

Key: *There is a fire in the fireplace, a cushion on the chair, a pear tree in front of a wall in the garden, tulips under the tree and two cats (a black one following a grey one) walking through the garden.*

Activity 3

Aims: to listen for detail; to check their ideas about the reasons for Bertha's happiness

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1. Refer the students back to their lists of the reasons for Bertha's happiness. Explain that the next extract they will hear will help them complete the lists that they started. Play Track 2. Let them compare their lists before asking them what they heard. Then hand out the transcripts and draw their attention to the parts labelled Track 1 and Track 2. Point out that they can now check their answers for the two activities (their lists and the sketch). When the students have had enough time to read and check, go over any answers as necessary.

Key: *She is young.; She and Harry are in love as well as good friends.; She has an adorable baby.; They don't have to worry about money.; They have a nice house and garden.; They have interesting friends.; They have books and music.; She has a wonderful dressmaker.; They are going abroad in the summer.; They have a good cook.*

2. Ask the students for the significance of the pear tree in the story.

Key: *As stated in the story, Bertha sees "the lovely pear tree [...] as a symbol of her own life". Her outfit even matches the colours of the scene with the pear tree.*

Activity 4

Aim: to listen for specific information

1. Explain that Bertha and Harry have invited some friends for dinner. Draw the students' attention to the table in Activity 2 on the worksheet. Explain that they should make notes about the guests using the categories given. Play Track 3.

Key:

guest's name	profession and interests	wearing ...	their journey to the party	other notes
Norman Knight	<i>theatre director</i>	<i>monocle</i>	<i>shared his wife's experience</i>	<i>students' own notes - check in transcript</i>
Mrs Knight	<i>interior design</i>	<i>orange coat with monkey design, yellow dress, amber earrings</i>	<i>people on the train stared at her coat</i>	<i>students' own notes - check in transcript</i>
Eddie Warren	<i>poet (recently published)</i>	<i>white silk scarf, white socks</i>	<i>bad experience in the taxi</i>	<i>students' own notes - check in transcript</i>
Pearl Fulton	<i>Bertha doesn't know</i>	<i>not arrived yet</i>	<i>not arrived yet</i>	<i>students' own notes - check in transcript</i>

Activity 5

Aim: to practise emphatic stress for dramatic effect in double comparative (*the ..., the ...*) sentences

1. Ask the students to read Eddie Warren's account of his journey to the party and decide to what extent they think it is true. Elicit the genre of story he is telling (a sort of gothic horror) and his way of speaking (with a great deal of exaggeration). Ask them to listen again and notice how the words in italics are stressed in order to achieve that effect. Play Track 4. Write on the board:

The more I knocked and called, the faster he went.

Ask the students to identify the stressed words in the sentence (*more, faster*). Also elicit the meaning of the sentence by asking: "Why did the taxi driver go faster?" (because Eddie knocked and called for the driver to slow down).

2. Dictate the following sentence stems for the students to finish with an appropriate double comparative:

1. The sooner you finish your dinner, ...
2. The more money you save, ...
3. The more Bertha thought about her life, ...

Give the students time to complete their sentences, then put them in small groups to read their sentences to one another, paying special attention to sentence stress. Have them vote for their favourite sentences, which they can read to the other groups in whole-class feedback.

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Key (example answers): 1. The sooner you finish your dinner, the more time you'll have to watch TV. 2. The more money you save, the more you can spend on my present! 3. The more Bertha thought about her life, the happier she became.

Activity 6

Aim: to explore the relationships between the guests

1. Put the students into groups of between two and four. Ask them to imagine that, along with the guests in the story, their group have also been invited to Bertha and Harry's dinner party. Everyone has arrived and now they are all going to sit down to dinner. The students must arrange the seating plan to ensure all the guests (including themselves!) have an enjoyable evening with stimulating conversation. Draw a rectangle on the board to represent the table, with Harry and Bertha at opposite ends and places for the guests along the table. Give them five minutes to plan the seating arrangement.
2. When the plans are ready, ask the students to show their plans to a neighbouring group and justify their decisions.

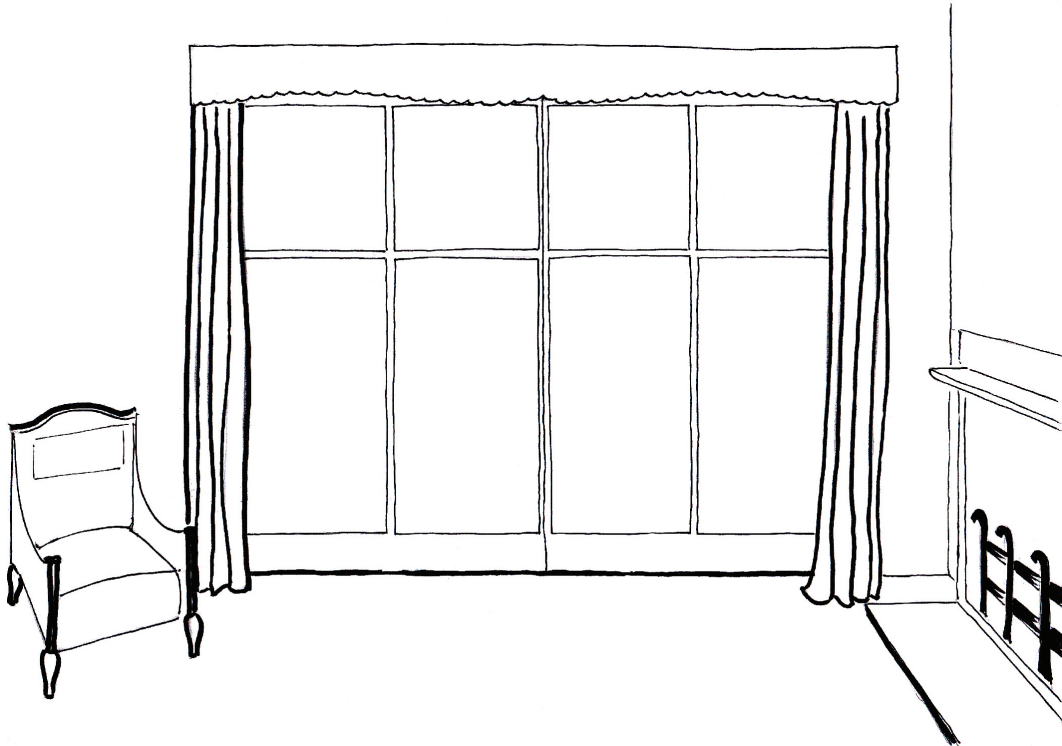
Follow-up tasks

1. Students continue Bertha's journal account of her day.
2. They use image search engines to find photographs of rooms similar to those they imagine in Bertha's house: the drawing room, the dining room, the hall where the guests arrive, the nursery, etc. They can bring them to the next lesson to compare and decide which images are closest to what they imagine.

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Activity 1

Complete the sketch of Bertha's drawing room and garden.



Worksheet

Activity 2

Listen and complete the table.

guest's name	profession and interests	wearing ...	their journey to the party	other notes
Norman Knight				
Mrs Knight				
Eddie Warren				
Pearl Fulton		not arrived yet	not arrived yet	

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 Part 2

They had people coming to dinner. The Norman Knights – a very **sound** couple – he was about to start a theatre, and she was awfully keen on interior decoration, a young man, Eddie Warren, who had just published a little book of poems and whom everybody was asking to dine, and a ‘find’ of Bertha’s called Pearl Fulton. What Miss Fulton did, Bertha didn’t know. They had met at the club and Bertha had fallen in love with her, as she always did fall in love with beautiful women who had something strange about them.

Track 3

The **provoking** thing was that, though they had been about together and met a number of times and really talked, Bertha couldn’t yet make her out. Up to a certain point Miss Fulton was rarely, wonderfully **frank**, but the certain point was there, and beyond that she would not go.

Was there anything beyond it? Harry said ‘No.’ Voted her dullish, and ‘cold like all blonde women, with a touch, perhaps, of **anaemia** of the brain’. But Bertha wouldn’t agree with him; not yet, at any rate.

‘No, the way she has of sitting with her head a little on one side, and smiling, has something behind it, Harry, and I must find out what that something is.’

‘Most likely it’s a good stomach,’ answered Harry.

He made a point of **catching Bertha’s heels** with replies of that kind ... ‘liver frozen, my dear girl’, or ‘pure **flatulence**’, or ‘kidney disease’, ... and so on. For some strange reason Bertha liked this, and almost admired it in him very much.

She went into the drawing-room and lighted the fire; then picking up the cushions, one by one, that Mary had disposed so carefully, she threw them back on to the chairs and the couches. That made all the difference; the room came alive at once. As she was about to throw the last one she surprised herself by suddenly hugging it to her, passionately, passionately. But it did not put out the fire in her bosom. Oh, on the contrary!

Track 1

The windows of the drawing-room opened on to a balcony overlooking the garden. At the far end, against the wall, there was a tall, **slender** pear tree in fullest, richest **bloom**; it stood perfect, as though becalmed against the jade-green sky. Bertha couldn’t help feeling, even from this distance, that it had not a single bud or a faded petal. Down below, in the garden beds, the red and yellow tulips, heavy with flowers, seemed to lean upon the dusk. A grey cat, dragging its belly, crept across the lawn, and a black one, its shadow, trailed after. The sight of them, so intent and so quick, gave Bertha a curious shiver.

‘What **creepy** things cats are!’ she stammered, and she turned away from the window and began walking up and down ...

How strong the **jonquils** smelled in the warm room. Too strong? Oh no. And yet, as though overcome, she flung down on a couch and pressed her hands to her eyes.

‘I’m too happy – too happy!’ she murmured.

And she seemed to see on her eyelids the lovely pear tree with its wide open blossoms as a symbol of her own life.

Really – really – she had everything. She was young. Harry and she were as much in love as ever, and they got on together splendidly and were really good pals. She had an adorable baby. They didn’t have to worry about money. They had this absolutely satisfactory house and garden. And friends – modern, thrilling friends, writers and painters and poets or people keen on social questions – just the kind of friends they wanted. And then there were books, and there was music, and she had found a wonderful little dressmaker, and they were going abroad in the summer, and their new cook made the most superb omelettes ...

Track 2

‘I’m absurd. Absurd!’ She sat up; but she felt quite dizzy, quite drunk. It must have been the spring.

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Yes, it was the spring. Now she was so tired she could not drag herself upstairs to dress. A white dress, a string of jade beads, green shoes and stockings. It wasn't intentional. She had thought of this **scheme** hours before she stood at the drawing-room window.

Her **petals** rustled softly into the hall, and she kissed Mrs Norman Knight, who was taking off the most amusing orange coat with a procession of black monkeys around the hem and up the fronts.

'... Why! Why! Why is the middle-class so stodgy – so utterly without a sense of humour! My dear, it's only by a **fluke** that I am here at all – Norman being the protective fluke. For my darling monkeys so upset the train that it rose to a man and simply ate me with its eyes. Didn't laugh – wasn't amused – that I should have loved. No, just stared – and bored me through and through.'

'But the **cream** of it was,' said Norman, pressing a large **tortoiseshell-rimmed monocle** into his eye, 'you don't mind me telling this, Face, do you?' (In their home and among their friends they called each other Face and Mug.) 'The cream of it was when she, being **full fed**, turned to the woman beside her and said: "Haven't you ever seen a monkey before?"'

'Oh, yes!' Mrs Norman Knight joined in the laughter. 'Wasn't that too absolutely creamy?'

And a funnier thing still was that now her coat was off she did look like a very intelligent monkey – who had even made that yellow silk dress out of scraped banana skins. And her amber ear-rings; they were like little dangling nuts.

'This is a sad, sad fall!' said Mug, pausing in front of Little B's perambulator. 'When the **perambulator** comes into the hall –' and he waved the rest of the quotation away.

The bell rang. It was lean, pale Eddie Warren (as usual) in a state of **acute** distress.

'It is the right house, *isn't it*?' he pleaded.

'Oh, I think so – I hope so,' said Bertha brightly.

'I have had such a **dreadful** experience with a taxi-man; he was *most* sinister. I couldn't get him to *stop*. The *more* I knocked and called the *faster* he went. And *in* the moonlight the *bizarre* figure with the *flattened* head **crouching** over the *lit-tle* wheel ...'

He shuddered, taking off an immense white silk scarf. Bertha noticed that his socks were white, too – most charming.

'But how dreadful!' she cried.

'Yes, it really was,' said Eddie, following her into the drawing-room. 'I saw myself *driving* through Eternity in a *timeless* taxi.'

He knew the Norman Knights. In fact, he was going to write a play for N. K. when the theatre scheme came off.

'Well, Warren, how's the play?' said Norman Knight, dropping his monocle and giving his eyes a moment in which to rise to the surface before it was screwed down again.

And Mrs Norman Knight: 'Oh, Mr Warren, what happy socks!'

'I *am* so glad you like them,' said he, staring at his feet. 'They seem to have got so *much* whiter since the moon rose.' And he turned his lean sorrowful young face to Bertha. 'There *is* a moon, you know.'

She wanted to cry: 'I am sure there is – often – often!'

He really was a most attractive person. But so was Face, crouched before the fire in her banana skins, and so was Mug, smoking a cigarette and saying as he flicked the ash: 'Why doth the bridegroom **tarry**?'

'There he is, now.'

Track 3

Track 4

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Glossary

sound (formal) reliable and sensible

provoking annoying

frank honest

anaemia a medical condition in which your blood contains too few red blood cells

catch someone's heels (rare) surprise someone

flatulence too much gas in your stomach or intestines

slender not very wide

bloom if a tree or plant is in bloom, it is covered with flowers

creepy unpleasant in a way that makes you feel nervous or frightened

jonquil a kind of flower

scheme a combination of colours used together

petal one of the coloured parts around the centre of a flower

fluke something that happens unexpectedly because of an accident or good luck

cream (rare) the best part

tortoiseshell made of the hard shell of a type of brown and orange turtle

monocle a glass lens for one eye, used in the past to help you see better

full fed (rare) when you have reached the limits of your patience (normally 'fed up')

perambulator (old-fashioned) the full form of 'pram', a carriage with wheels for a baby

acute very serious or severe

crouch to lean forwards with your head and shoulders bent

tarry (literary) to stay somewhere longer than you should; 'Why doth the bridegroom tarry?' means 'Why is the bridegroom late?'