



## The Voyage by Katherine Mansfield

### ABOUT THE STORY

*The Voyage* is a short story written in 1921. At the start of the story, Fenella, her grandmother and her father arrive at a harbour in New Zealand in the dead of night. The harbour is in darkness, but as they make their way down the wharf they encounter more and more people hurrying to catch the boat to Picton, a town on the South Island of New Zealand. After saying their goodbyes, Fenella and her grandmother board the boat and sail to Picton, where they are met by Fenella's grandfather. The reader is initially kept in suspense as to the purpose of their voyage, but during the course of the story it becomes clear that Fenella's mother has recently died and that she is going to live with her grandparents.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katherine Mansfield was a short-story writer, born in New Zealand in 1888. Her stories were first published when she was a teenager, in her school magazine. In 1903, her family moved to London, where she continued to write and contribute to her college magazine. She briefly returned to New Zealand and started writing professionally, but later returned to the UK. She was a keen traveller, unable to stay or settle in one place for very long. In 1917, she was diagnosed with tuberculosis and, after a few years of deteriorating health, she died in France in 1923 at the age of just 34. In her short lifetime she wrote over 40 short stories as well as a large number of letters and journals.

The Picton boat was due to leave at half-past eleven. It was a beautiful night, mild, starry, only when they got out of the cab and started to walk down the Old Wharf that jutted out into the harbour, a faint wind blowing off the water ruffled under Fenella's hat, and she put up her hand to keep it on. It was dark on the Old Wharf, very dark; the wool sheds, the cattle trucks, the cranes standing up so high, the little squat railway engine, all seemed carved out of solid darkness. Here and there on a rounded wood-pile, that was like the stalk of a huge black mushroom, there hung a lantern, but it seemed afraid to unfurl its timid, quivering light in all that blackness; it burned softly, as if for itself.

Fenella's father pushed on with quick, nervous strides. Beside him her grandma bustled along in her crackling black ulster; they went so fast that she had now and again to give an undignified little skip to keep up with them. As well as her luggage strapped into a neat sausage, Fenella carried clasped to her her grandma's umbrella, and the handle, which was a swan's head, kept giving her shoulder a sharp little peck as if it too wanted her to hurry... Men, their caps pulled down, their collars turned up, swung by; a few women all muffled scurried along; and one tiny boy, only his little black arms and legs showing out of a white woolly shawl, was jerked along angrily between his father and mother; he looked like a baby fly that had fallen into the cream.

Then suddenly, so suddenly that Fenella and her grandma both leapt, there sounded from behind the largest woolshed, that had a trail of smoke hanging over it, 'Mia-oo-oo-O-O!'

'First whistle,' said her father briefly, and at that moment they came in sight of the Picton boat. Lying beside the dark wharf, all strung, all beaded with round golden lights, the

Picton boat looked as if she was more ready to sail among stars than out into the cold sea. People pressed along the gangway. First went her grandma, then her father, then Fenella. There was a high step down on to the deck, and an old sailor in a jersey standing by gave her his dry, hard hand. They were there; they stepped out of the way of the hurrying people, and standing under a little iron stairway that led to the upper deck they began to say good-bye.

'There, mother, there's your luggage!' said Fenella's father, giving grandma another strapped-up sausage.

45 'Thank you, Frank.'

'And you've got your cabin tickets safe?'

'Yes, dear.'

'And your other tickets?'

Grandma felt for them inside her glove and showed him the tips.

50 'That's right.'

He sounded stern, but Fenella, eagerly watching him, saw that he looked tired and sad. 'Mia-oo-oo-O-O!' The second whistle blared just above their heads, and a voice like a cry 55 shouted, 'Any more for the gangway?'

'You'll give my love to father,' Fenella saw her father's lips say. And her grandma, very agitated, answered, 'Of course I will, dear. Go now. You'll be left. Go now, Frank. Go now.'

'It's all right, mother. I've got another three minutes.' To her surprise Fenella saw her father take off his hat. He clasped grandma in his arms and pressed her to him. 'God bless you, mother!' she heard him say.

And grandma put her hand, with the black thread glove that was worn through on her ring finger, against his cheek, and 65 she sobbed, 'God bless you, my own brave son!'

### VOCABULARY FOCUS

**wharf (line 3):** a structure for boats to stop at, leading from the land out into the water

**jutted out (line 4):** extended out

**ruffled (line 5):** moved

**squat (line 8):** short and wide

**unfurl (line 11):** spread out

**ulster (line 16):** an old type of coat

**muffled (line 23):** wrapped up in thick clothing for warmth

**agitated (line 57):** nervous and upset



## The Voyage by Katherine Mansfield

### Before reading

- 1 You are going to read an extract from a short story called *The Voyage*. What is a voyage? How is it different to a journey?
- 2 The story is about a girl making a voyage. Work in pairs and discuss your answers to these questions.
  - 1 What kind of voyage do you think she is making?
  - 2 Why is she making it?
- 3 Read *About the author*. Is there anything in Mansfield's biography that might have influenced her to write this story?

### While reading

- 1 Read the extract and answer these questions.
  - 1 Where is the extract set?
  - 2 Who are the three main characters?
  - 3 What time of day is it?
  - 4 Where are they going?
  - 5 Who is leaving?
  - 6 Who is going to meet them at the other end?
- 2 Read the extract again. Decide if these statements are True (T) or False (F). Find evidence in the text to support your answer.
 

1 The three main characters are in a hurry.	T / F
2 Fenella finds it easy to keep up with her father and grandma.	T / F
3 There are lots of people at the harbour.	T / F
4 It's very quiet in the harbour.	T / F
5 Fenella and her grandmother have a lot of luggage.	T / F
6 They get on the boat with a few minutes to spare.	T / F
- 3 The author uses many different verbs instead of the word 'walk'. Find and underline them. What do these words have in common? How do they contribute to the tone of the extract?
- 4 Look at the beginning of the first two paragraphs and lines 57–58. How does the author use sentence length to further contribute to the general tone of hurrying and rushing?
- 5 Read the extract in more detail and answer these questions.
  - 1 What is the narrative mode? Who is the narrator?
  - 2 Overall is the vocabulary simple or complex? Why do you think that is?

- 3 Look at the first two paragraphs. Find two examples of anthropomorphism and two similes.
- 4 Whose point of view is the story written from? What specific observations show this? What other linguistic devices does the author use to show this?

- 6 Read the conversation between Fenella's father and grandma from line 43 to the end. Answer these questions, finding evidence in the text where relevant.

- 1 What do you think the father is usually like? How does he feel here?
- 2 How does the grandma feel here?
- 3 Why do you think the grandma's black glove 'was worn through on her ring finger'? What does this tell us about her?
- 4 How do you think Fenella is feeling here?
- 5 Why do you think the father and grandma are feeling the way they are?

### After reading

- 1 Work in small groups and discuss these questions.
  - 1 Look back at your predictions in *Before reading* 2. Can you make any further predictions about why Fenella is making this voyage? What do you think has happened prior to the extract? Read *About the story* to check your ideas.
  - 2 Do you think Fenella will come back? Why/Why not?
  - 3 Read this line about the boat: *the Picton boat looked as if she was more ready to sail among stars than out into the cold sea*. Why does the boat seem 'more ready to sail among stars'? What does this tell us about the boat and about how Fenella sees it? What does this symbolise about Fenella and her voyage to Picton?
- 2 Imagine you are Fenella and have arrived at your grandparents' house in Picton. You are going to write a diary entry describing your first impressions of your new surroundings. First make notes of the things you see, hear and smell.
- 3 Now write your diary entry. Include at least one simile and one example of anthropomorphism (Example: *trees – huge trees swaying in the wind like dancing giants*).
- 4 Work in groups and read your diary entries to each other.