Chapter V

The Magic Island

> Who is he that hideth councel without knowledge?
> therefore have I uttered things that I understood not;
> things too wonderful for me, which I knew not?
>
> (The Book of Job)

In early 1916 Katherine Mansfield was busy making notes for a fresh beginning of "The Aloe", sometime after her brother's death in an explosion. An escape into a desired land seemed the only alternative to sticking to one's fidelities in those war years. D.H. Lawrence had confided to Murry that there was no point in writing anything. The conditions of life should be changed first. Mansfield — self-opinionated, erratic and individualistic, had the same reaction to strange inconveniences caused by the war, but unlike Lawrence, she kept her utopian territory to herself. Lawrence had been dreaming of Rananim where he would form a colony of congenial people, " 'a life in which the only riches is integrity of character' " (Harry T. Moore, The Intelligent Heart : The Story of D.H. Lawrence, 234). Tired of the personal element, he urged his friends to join him. Mansfield could never agree to the proposal. Rananim (named after one of Koteliansky's Hebrew songs), was an impediment to her creative pursuit. Besides, there would be no cultural identification. Mansfield was intent on writing about her own undiscovered country. Her arcadia was surely to be topographically, artistically and

culturally her very own, the reconstruction of which must have been triggered off by Leslie Beauchamp's death and a letter from Lawrence in sincere grief:

> Do not be sad. It is one life which is passing away from us, one "I" is dying; but there is another coming into being, which is happy, creative, you. I knew you had to die with your brother; you also go down into death and be extinguished. But for us there is a rising from the grave, there is a resurrection, and a clean life to begin from the start ...
>
> (Sylvia Berkman, Katherine Mansfield, 70).

Soon after arriving in Bandol after the bereavement Mansfield wrote in her journal : "I do not wish to go anywhere ..." (Murry, Journal of Katherine Mansfield, 89). She had ultimately learnt to make reparations for her duplicacies and sin. Like a phoenix she rose from her own ashes. Her resurrection precisely implies a renewal of her rovings to all remembered places till she exhausted her store. In a letter to Brett, Mansfield reminisced her invulnerable memories and apprised her of her novel experiment : "I tried to catch that moment - with something of its sparkle and flavour, then smother it again and then again disclose it" (O'Sullivan & Scott, I, 331). The exhibition of Post-Impressionist paintings in the year 1910 by Roger Fry must also be regarded as a cumulative influence. Mansfield wrote to Dorothy Brett how Van Gogh's "Sunflowers" seemed to reveal something she had not realized before. It lived with her afterwards.

Karori and Muritai, with memories of days spent there, could be only relived in myth. Freud believed that myths were projections. He assumed the unconscious to be the storehouse. In a myth the forces of the unconscious find harmony in a rational light of the consciousness. Freud went further to imagine the unconscious as a cellar which stored sexual fantasies which the conscious would never know about. His ardent admirer C.G. Jung is of the opinion that what we encounter in myths and literature are "merely archetypal images" (K.K. Ruthven, Myth : The Critical Idiom, 20). There is a basic affinity between myth and literature. If available mythologies prove unsatisfactory, an author can always invent his own system. An invented mythology does not have the resonances of an inherited one and is acceptable to only a select coterie. Mansfield had initially started as act of escape into the simplicities of childhood with a desire to bring something unspoilt and pure into the meaningless present. Her myth provides her with a necessary connection with a past that emerges from the dark depths of the unconscious.

Kezia, the girl child's name in Mansfield's Karori tales, is derived from The Book of Job : "He also had seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first Jemima; and the name of the second Kezia" (The Book of Job, Chapter 42, lines 13 & 14). It is not for nothing that Mansfield chooses the name in her first decisive step towards evolving a personal mythology. For an egoist like Mansfield, The Book of Job naturally served

as an excellent source. Lawrence had openly admitted the greatness of The Book of Job. "If you want a story of your own soul, it is perfectly done in The Book of Job — much better than in Letters from the Underworld", Lawrence wrote to Gordon Campbell in a letter in December, 1914, that Harry. T. Moore cites in his study entitled The Intelligent Heart : The Story of D.H. Lawrence (226). The Lord had directed Job to cast abroad the rage of his wrath : "and behold every one that is proud, and abase him" (The Book of Job, Chapter 40, line 11). Job has been blessed more in the end than at the beginning, after his repentance in dust and ashes. His being blessed for the second time implies a resurrection; a rising from chaos. Katherine Mansfield must have been impressed with this theme and discerned the ideal father in Job whose daughters were fair and their father "gave them inheritance among their brethren" (The Book of Job, Chapter 42, line 15).

Kezia, thoroughly unwanted by her mother, is left behind with her sister Lottie in the house as the family leaves for a new home. Linda Burnell, her mother, is visibly relieved to leave them behind. Kezia's response to Linda's vehemence is noticeable. She does not weep like Lottie at the disappearance of the buggy. Making a face at Mrs. Samuel Joseph's undone placket, the secretive Kezia does her best to conceal her confusion. The old big house is changed and strangely charged with the occupants gone. Upstairs in her parents' living room, Kezia finds a pill box : " 'I could keep a bird's egg in that' " - she decides (Alpers, Stories, 226). It is precisely the female child's cognitive development

that is enunciated in the term 'egg'. The egg is essentially female and it is only the female egg that hatches into new life. Both in society and family, women are psychologically important to men in terms of their fertility, the single biological quality that is etymologized in the term 'egg'. Kezia is disturbed at her untimely entry into the dark, demure exclusively adult world. A female child's plight at her first glimpse of feminine protuberance had been categorically explored in Mansfield's early story, "At Lehmann's". Sabina, the child maid had reacted in her own way, to her landlady's pregnancy which the women called 'journey to Rome'. It was a puzzle and Sabina never got to know what men had to do with it.

Sabina, a poor servant girl, could not escape her fate. The young man who tried to molest her was held back by a shriek and she escaped from the outrage. Mansfield has matured remarkably in 'Prelude' as an artist since her Bavarian Sketches. Her preciosity and mute suggestiveness have outdistanced the prosaic portrayals of "At Lehmann's". That Linda Burnell could not possibly have held a child is an obvious suggestion of her pregnancy which must have been noticed by the discreet and shrewd Kezia.

A male child's entry into the adult male world is marked by confidence, fear and anticipation. Nick Adams' boldness in Hemingway's remarkable story "The Killers", is a brilliant contrast to Kezia's pusillanimous advances. The two gangsters who

come to kill Ole Andreson, a Swede, at Henry's lunchroom have an air of vicious finality — that is foreign to Nick. Tired of waiting, the killers leave the place. Nick, in a sudden gesture, decides to go up to Andreson's place to warn him of the danger. In his tete-a-tete with the Swede, Nick sounds decisive and stern.

> 'Don't you want me to go and see the police?'
> 'No', Ole Andreson said. 'That wouldn't do any good .'
> 'Isn't there something I could do?'
> 'No. There ain't anything to do .'
> 'Maybe it was just a bluff .'
> 'No. It ain't just a bluff .'
> (Books & Penn Warren, 193).

Andreson's involvement in some terrible operation is confirmed by his inactivity. Nick cannot come to terms with the gruesome experience. Unlike the Negro cook who prefers to be deaf in order to survive, and George who has an air of casual indifference, Nick cannot afford to be a silent observer. In trepidation, he decides to leave the place. Nick has had his first glimpse of adult experience in the professional casualness of the gangsters, Ole Andreson's acceptance of his fate, and George's dismissal of the whole episode. "The Killers" is basically, Nick's story.

Kezia's discovery of adult hypocrisy and cruelty is presented in an atrocious episode in "Prelude". Pat, the buggy

driver, looks like a savage sorcerer. He beckons the children to show them how the kings of Ireland chop the head off a duck. The children follow him like the rats of Hamelin, charmed by his magic. Coaxing the ducks, Pat pretends to show them the grain. The greedy ducks gobble at the food and at that strategic point Pat seizes two ducks. Their darting heads and round eyes frighten the girls but not Pip, as he is a boy. At the sight of waddling headless duck, Pip dances and yells. Kezia is in a frenzy when she sees the beheaded duck. She implores Pat to put the head back. Her horror and violent cries to restore the duck back to life are touching. It is the malevolent adult duplicacy to which Kezia finds herself maladjusted. Tragically, the king of Ireland's charm works no more.

Myth and ritual replicate each other in the duck-hunt. The magical doing away with the duck's head works on the level of action while the mythical element exists on the conceptual level. Things which have once been into contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the contact has been severed, which, according to James Frazer is one of the principles on which magic is based. The duck's head does not seem to be lifeless, as if it could spring to life at the magician's will. Pat's power is by no means arbitrary and unlimited. He cannot weild it any longer as he has been deceitful.

In the magic world of Karori, Kezia's confrontations with the grown-up world are vividly explored. In "At the Bay" she is seen in repose with her grandmother, bewildered by the story of her uncle William's death. Kezia forms her own version of the death scene : "... A little man falling over like a tin soldier by the side of a big black hole" (Alpers, Stories, 456). Her grandmother's calm adult acceptance of her son's death puzzles Kezia, but slowly she becomes resilient. As she tickles her grandmother, the death spell evaporates. A discreet Kezia charms the reader in "The Doll's House". Being fully aware of the fact that the Kelvey girls have been socially boycotted, she invites them to see the doll's house. Lil Kelvey's warning : " 'Your ma told our ma you wasn't to speak to us' " (Alpers, Stories, 504), is reciprocated by Kezia's stubborn determination. She boldly ushers them into the big house to see the lamp. Conscious of the class difference between her and the Kelveys, she makes a desperate attempt to break down the social bulwark. The spell is broken by Beryl Fairfield's unceremonious entry. Her histrionics shakes the Kelvey girls out of their wits and forces Kezia to withdraw. Kezia's adolescent mission is successful to some extent as the Kelveys manage to have a glimpse of the little lamp before fleeing.

The 'little lamp' is paramount in its symbolic content. In late October 1921, Mansfield noted the central idea of "The Doll's House" in her journal. "At Karori : 'The little lamp. I seen it' " (Alpers, Stories, Commentary, 573). The need for spiritual illumination at the time of severe

physical crisis could no longer be concealed. This was precisely the time when Mansfield was imploring Koteliansky for information about Manoukhin. She had a feeling that her illness was not entirely physical. A prayer in her notebook that Alpers cites in his biography of hers, is particularly revealing in this context : "Lord make me crystal clear for thy light to shine through" (347). Life alone can impart life. The flickering incandescence may lack in glitter but its faint glimmer has a sincere appeal. When a person speaks the truth in the spirit of truth, he is clear as heavens. Mansfield must have undergone a kind of spiritual transfiguration, overcoming all barriers to truth. She was possibly conscious of the Nemesis presiding over all intellectual work. Emerson has clarified this point with his usual ardour : "We have yet to learn that the thing uttered in words is not therefore affirmed. A work of art should affirm itself ..." (Essays & Journals, 141). A clear, solid consciousness is the optimum requirement for such affirmation.

Mansfield's first decisive step toward achieving that new clarity and freshness lay in retracing her steps into an undisturbed, natural concave of family love with a stubborn, instinctual insistence. She was prepared to use up all her energy in the recreation of the family saga. D.H. Lawrence contributed to the sudden resurgence of feeling in a peculiar way. His latest novel Women in Love had arrived for review at the Murrys' and Mansfield, shocked at the rancorous portraits that Lawrence made of his friends, tried to restrain herself. Richard Aldingtow,

a biographer of Lawrence and a friend of his remarked once that the book (Women in Love) was about everybody in hate with the possible exception of Birkin and Ursula. Mansfield figures out Lawrence's onslaughts as the work of a disturbed mind. She was convinced of his illness and felt that only family love could alleviate the tension. Dorothy Brett received a letter in August 1921 from Mansfield, expressing the urgency of love in family cirlces. Till 1915 Mansfield was satisfied with occasional reminiscences i.e. "The Wind Blows", "The Apple Tree" or "The Aloe". In 1921 the momentum was noticeable. Three Karori stories were completed within the span of four months (Alpers has confirmed that "The Garden Party" was founded on a Karori incident). "At the Bay" and "The Doll's House" are the two other pieces completed after Lawrence's malicious attack.

The topography of Karori forms the plexus of the island stories. The outstretching pastures, the Karakas, large totara forests at the hillside, the littoral 'Muritai' and the sleepy sea are the phantasmagoria of the Karori tales. Impressions fill the space in the strange land of Karori. Smell of leaves and wet, black earth mingles with the sharp smell of the sea. The shepherd with his meek sheep keeps up a soft, light whistling that sounds mournful and tender. The quietness and the mist instill a sense of reposeful charm. No harsh sounds are heard. The bleat of sheep "...sounded in the dream of little children", (Alpers, Stories, 442), the shepherd's whistle is soft and airy and the waves come rippling. It is an eternal self-search in the realm of a never ending

metamorphosis: "Now a thread like creature wavered by and was lost. Something was happening to the pink, waving trees; they were changing into a cold moonlight blue" (Alpers, Stories, 455). The inner plungings and deep disclosures of the deracinated consciousness are echoed in natural motions. The world shaped by ancient rhythms has a positive role to play in Mansfield's creative pursuit. The sheep, the sleepy sea and the entire paraphernalia intercommunicate with the human drama.

Amidst the drugged setting, dream figures move about and react. Nature offers the Kelvey children a primeval shelter against class hatred in "The Doll's House". The sisters look 'dreamily' over the hay paddocks past the creek. As they look at the pasture from their palliative resort, their shame and suffering is absorbed in nature. In Karori's natural ambience, Kezia magically dissolves in the denoument of "Prelude" : "Then she tiptoed far too quickly and airily" (Alpers, Stories, 259). Disgusted with adult duplicacies, Kezia merges with the elements. Putting the cream jar on the Calico cat's ear, she had made it look at itself in the mirror. "Now look at yourself", she had told the cat (Alpers, Stories, 258). Her sternness is due to her wrath, as she cannot make the grown ups look at themselves. The inverted animal image fills her with anger as suggested by "hot all over" (Stories, 258), and she disappears.

Dreams are the aorta of Katherine Mansfield's fantasy. The relative autonomy of dream life involves unconscious processes at work. The dream becomes a guiding image for Mansfield. It is a

part of nature which does not deceive but expresses something. Dreams, according to C.G. Jung, are processes to which no arbitariness can be attributed. They help Mansfield to get over her feeling of disorientation and confer meaning upon the banality of life. There are traces of a collective beneath Mansfield's personal psyche. The individual in her dreamland is part of a collective exercise. The sea, the paddocks, the Karakas and every minuscule expression of life infuse a sense of cohesion. A cohesive family unit is Mansfield's choice in her fantastic rovings. The psyche of her subject oscillates like a pendulum between tangible and intangible experience. A secure family recline favours dreams. Linda Burnell is favourably disposed towards dreaming. She finds a congenial companion in the aloe. The aloe exists beyond the possibility of dissociation in a condition of integrity, consonance and clarity.

Alice, the servant girl, is seen busily absorbed in a book interpreting dreams in the magic world of Karori. Alice's book is full of warnings : "To dream of black-beetles drawing a hearse is band. Signifies death of one you hold near or dear ..." (Alpers, Stories, 250). Next comes the spider dream. Insect images are frequent in Karori. The two moths which fly in through the window and round and round the moonlight in "Prelude" are not brought into the story casually. Lamplight suggests exposure and threat to the sparky, fearless moths. Linda Burnell fears the provocative but fatal incandescence. The moths have a retrogressive effect

on her mind. Linda's awareness of her own forlorn predicament becomes explicit. In Alice's world insects are given human attributes. The movement of insects in her book has a worldly appeal. Necessity is the ultimate word in Alice's dream world. Her sooty practical existence forms the ground work of her dreams : "Spiders. To dream of spiders creeping over you is good. Signifies large sum of money in near future" (Alpers, Stories, 250). For Alice insect images are either good or bad and are relevant for future prospects against a depressing and derelict present.

Kezia wants to be a bee because it is an insect. She feels the yellow, furry, striped legs about her. Kezia wishes to be tiny but powerful. Pip's model is the bull that would frighten the bee. Jonathan Trout discovers the likeness of his predicament to an insect's. Dashing agains the wall, the windows and ceilings, he does everything on God's earth to hurt himself like the fly. What he does not dare is a flight outside. The vast dangerous garden full of possibilities awaits him, but he gives up. A straight, undaunted passage is an impossibility in his case. Much earlier in her story "Something Childish but very Natural", Mansfield had presented a moth in Henry's dream. In a strange metamorphosis the moth had become a girl handing him a telegram. The telegram is a token of urgency, which tolls the knell of Henry's dream. The beautiful garden recoils into his psyche. Vestiges of old experience exist in the unconscious. They are not dead but belong to our being. Mansfield's stream of fantasies often

smother them like Henry's garden. Insects become psychological realities in Mansfield's fantasy. Her flies and moths are not the Dostoivskian worms upon earth, foul and ill-gained. They are tiny, fearless creatures. There is a beauty in them that strikes the reader in spite of the fatality of their condition.

Gardens at night impinge on human consciousness. The moon and the astral rays inspire strange speculations. The melancholy of the trees has a soothing effect on the bruised psyche, away from the harsh insentience of the outer world or industrial noises. Seclusion in a garden is illusory as the practical world seldom allows a person to be private and withdrawn. The invaluable aloneness has an irresistible attraction. A solitary soul recoils from all human contact in Mansfield's Karori stories. Linda Burnell stands on the grassy bank to have a look at the aloe. The scent of midnight flowers impact on her delicate constitution. She dreams, unaware of time or circumstances, of being rowed away in a boat. Her luminous exploration is more metaphorical than real. What is explicit is the desire to escape. Beryl Fairfield, mesmerised by the nocturnal mysteriousness of the garden watches the apparently motionless trees, wanting to reach out. Trees stand for the power of silence, that is so essential for thinking about life. The unspeaking reticence of the Manuka affects Beryl immediately. Night is the proper time for such ventures, when the individual can feel the potency of silence in a garden. Beryl comes to know parts of herself previously unrealized.

The garden in "The Garden Party" is spoilt by human interference. While the gardener mows the lawn, the stupid professional activity devours the strong and aristocratic silence of the garden. A motley crowd have to be amused with a manufactured colourful patchwork : "As for the roses, you could not help feeling they understood that roses are the only flowers that impress people at garden parties ..." (Alpers, Stories, 487). Affectation becomes an important thematic motif in "The Garden Party". The Karakas reinforce the idea of integrity-root, shoot and blossom. The tree-image has a long history of which Mansfield must have been aware, since she was a voracious reader. Blake in his Songs of Innocence, has spoken of a tree in whose branches love and harmony combine. Blake's tree of Experience is a poisoned tree, condemned because it negates the tree of love. Blake's tree of love is not a vegetable tree : "It is an organicist image ...," Frank Kermode confirms in his Romantic Image (100). The imagination enables it to live as a symbol. It is the quasi-instinctive happy and self-begotten expression of imaginative art. There is a pronounced insistence on the oneness of soul and body in Blake, a thought that had been haunting Mansfield since her reading of Cosmic Anatomy. Yeats, in his poem "The Two Trees" published in The Rose has introduced the holy tree of joy and the "surety of its hidden root" (W.B. Yeats, the Collected Poems, 54-55). The shaking leafy head of Yeats' tree symbolizes the creative integrated imagination. His other image of the broken tree with blackened boughs obviously suggests fragmentation. In "A Prayer for My Daughter" Yeats talks of a flourishing hidden tree and

green laurel that are rooted in a perpetual place. Rootedness of a tree is suggestive of firmness and direction. These were possibly Mansfield's most prized prerequisites at the time she wrote "The Garden Party".

Mansfield's Karakas are proud and solitary. They lift their leaves and fruit to the sun in silent but dignified submission. The Karakas must be hidden by the marquee. Nature must be meddled with to promote a pageant of masked people. There is a sense of sacrilege in this methodizing. Sharp lights and tutored conversations of people wanting to be entertained, destroy the private seclusion of the garden. In the world of colonial garden parties and barbeques, the affluent are oblivious of the working classes. Laura, like Kezia in "The Doll's House", makes a desperate attempt to undermine her family's class-hatred but does not succeed. Instinctual and arrogant, she is more fascinated by the poor muscular workmen than the spoilt, silly boys of her neighbourhood. The news of the accidental death of a poor neighbour puts Laura in a quandary. Outraged at the prospect of revelling in such an uncanny atmosphere, she persuades her mother to call the party off. Her mother's reaction is that of a cool, unfeeling grown up, corrupted by experience: "It's only by accident we heard of it" (Alpers, Stories, 494). The life or death of a workman can not hamper adult, affluent living. The very smoke coming out of their chimneys are silvery plumes, superimposed on poverty-stricken smoke of their poor neighbours.

Laura's hat is not a remedy but only a temporary relief. It alters her appearance and makes her look like a picture, unrealistic and foreign. The magical transformation is necessary for the oncoming masquerade. Laura, safe in the obscurity of her hat, is suddenly distanced from her original self. The poor, dead man and his family are like distant figures moving in a remote horizon : "But it all seemed blurred, unreal, like a picture in the newspaper" (Alpers, Stories, 495). Trying to put aside the denuded, morbid reality, Laura safeguards the interests and dignity of her rich parents. She cannot combine the two, complete disparate forms of experience, and chooses one to restore peace.

At the dead man's house, Laura finds herself face to face with the widow ; a stark inescapable reality ready to grind her. To the woman she is a stranger with a basket, not really having any point of contact with their lot. The dead man looks peaceful and absorbed in death. Both he and his wife belong to a foredoomed stratum of society. The chance of a meaningful conversation between Laura and the widow is nil. The dead man's strange composure rekindles Laura's lost feelings that had suddenly relapsed into an adult evasiveness. Conscious of her incrimination, Laura gropes for self-confidence. She feels she has committed an unwholesome crime in denying life in them and death as well. The naive dignity of death in the uncanny surroundings chokes Laura. "Forgive my hat" (Alpers, Stories, 499) is the

only sentence she can utter between her sobs, before rushing out of the bereaved house. Laura's walk is a purgatorial journey, hurtling forward through dead souls. Her realization of the magnitude of her offence would not have been possible without it. She survives the shock and departs, cured of her illusions. Home seems Laura's only reparation and the warmth of love the only restoring force. Family offers a protective shelter to the anguished psyche. Laura's despondent self is perhaps a camouflage for Mansfield herself. Two life-long conflicts tore her apart which Alpers sums up as the love-hate feeling with her father and the love hate feeling for her country. With the face of the world corrupted by war and death, she wanted to evoke new mythologies which would perform a prismatic function, refracting experience into its old hues and yet preserving its organic unity. She had to undergo a formal trial like Laura before she could create the family saga. The procedure was intense and strenuous in which old experience was cleansed and the mind revitalized.

Mansfield's myth-making faculty is in close propinquity with Lawrence's consummation. To Dorothy Brett she had confided the tremendous strain of the process:

> When I write about ducks I swear I am a white duck with a round eye, floating in a pond fringed with yellow blobs and taking an occasional dart of the other duck with the round eye, which floats upside down beneath me. In fact this whole process of becoming the duck (what Lawrence would, perhaps, call this

> consummation with the duck or the apple) is so thrilling that I can hardly breathe
> (O'Sullivan & Scott, I, 330).

To be alive, to be urgent and insistent is a not-to-be life for Lawrence. The highest of all is to melt out. Lawrence attempts to combine the dark, animal and instinctual with the enlightening conscious self. Mansfield temperamentally Lawrentian, was an ardent admirer of his passionate eagerness. Symbols were important to Lawrence in an elementary sense, and he wanted to make a ritual of the slightest activity. Mansfield's intentions are similar though she had no patience with some of Lawrence's ceremonies. What is evident is a struggle for honesty in Mansfield's case. Excruciating pains, a personal brand of antagonism to the war and a dismal darkness are contraries, without which there is no progression. Karori is the unbruised promised land, lying deep in the chequered shades of her dreams.

It is interesting to see how Mansfield always travels back to her central quest for self-awareness through waltzing out and in with multiple, apparently disparate themes in her stories. The theme of resurrection may easily give way to that of appearance and reality which again may bring in its trail the search for the centre of the feminine world vis-a-vis the adult-adolescent conflict. Class conflict (as betrayed in 'The Doll's House' or 'The Garden Party') cannot be studied in isolation because it seems to end up with a basic quest : in a

'house' of conflict among 'dolls', the lamp stands out as a beacon for the scared souls. The workman's death is illuminating as well as harrowing for Laura. Dreams and myths are brought in, but only to weild the relevant imagery that finally and as a whole points to Mansfield's struggle for the truth.