



The Tea Planter's Wife

By Dinah Jefferies

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THE NUMBER ONE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER 'My ideal read - I couldn't put it down' Santa Montefiore Dinah Jefferies' unforgettable new novel, *The Tea Planter's Wife* is a haunting, tender portrait of a woman forced to choose between her duty as a wife and her instinct as a mother... Nineteen-year-old Gwendolyn Hooper steps off a steamer in Ceylon full of optimism, eager to join her new husband. But the man who greets her at the tea plantation is not the same one she fell in love with in London. Distant and brooding, Laurence spends long days wrapped up in his work, leaving his young bride to explore the plantation alone. It's a place filled with clues to the past - locked doors, a yellowed wedding dress in a dusty trunk, an overgrown grave hidden in the grounds, far too small for an adult... Gwen soon falls pregnant and her husband is overjoyed, but she has little time to celebrate. In the delivery room the new mother is faced with a terrible choice, one she knows no one in her upper class set will understand - least of all Laurence. Forced to bury a secret at the heart of her marriage, Gwen is more isolated than ever. When the time comes, how will her husband ever understand what she has done? *The Tea Planter's Wife* is a story of guilt, betrayal and untold secrets vividly and entrancingly set in colonial era Ceylon.

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Editorial Review

Review

International Praise for *The Tea Planter's Wife*:

"Love, suspense, guilt, and hidden secrets with an underlying theme of race relations seamlessly blend together in a timeless story of an innocent young Englishwoman struggling to find her place in colonial Ceylon against unexpected circumstances and facing cruel choices."

—*New York Journal of Books*

"[A] dramatic tale of jealousy, deceit, secrets and heartbreak. The intrigue and suspense, add a Gothic flair to Jeffries fast-moving plot and the evocative atmosphere along with the realistic characters will captivate readers."

—*Romance Times Book Review*

"Spellbinding...effortlessly elegant, lushly descriptive...Combine this with the vivid, evocative manner in which Jefferies describes the beauty of Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, and the captivating cast of characters she has created, and you have a superbly written novel that readers of historical fiction as well as women's fiction will treasure."

—*Booklist* (starred review)

"...[A]n engrossing tale of mystery, manners, and prejudice set against the backdrop of Ceylon (current-day Sri Lanka)...Jeffries shows that she can weave a suspenseful tale in which characters' complex motivations converge in surprising ways."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"Rich and incredibly evocative, *The Tea Planter's Wife* is historical fiction at its very best. It's just spellbinding."

—*The Sunday Express*

"Locked doors, old dresses, even a boathouse mystery, this is *Rebecca* with crocodiles. Very enjoyable...mystery (and) full-blown escape into the past."

—*The Independent*

"My ideal read; mystery, love heartbreak and joy--I couldn't put it down."

— **Santa Montefiore, author of *The Beekeeper's Daughter***

"Beautifully written and heartrending, this has a magical setting with a real sense of period."

— **Katie Fforde, bestselling author of *A French Affair***

"A terrific emotional and atmospheric read."

— **Elizabeth Buchan, author of *Separate Beds***

"Dinah Jefferies has once again created a gloriously atmospheric and tension-filled novel. Immensely enjoyable, poignant, and compelling."

— **Isabel Wolff, author of *Shadows Over Paradise***

"I was spellbound from beginning to end."

— **Deborah Rodriguez, author of *A Cup of Friendship***

"A wonderful book, deeply touching, and an unforgettable read that swept me away. I loved it." — **Kate Furnivall, author of *The Italian Wife***

"Vibrant and compelling--Dinah Jefferies perfectly captures the flavour of colonial Ceylon."

— **Rosanna Ley, author of *The Villa***

"Dark secrets lie at every turn, hidden beneath layers of 1920s racism and the fearfulness of a crumbling colonial power, making for a thoroughly gripping tale."

— **Liz Trenow, author of *The Forgotten Seamstress***

From the Hardcover edition.

About the Author

Dinah Jefferies was born in Malaysia and moved to England at the age of nine. Her idyllic childhood always held a special place in her imagination, and when she began writing novels in her 60s, she was able to return there - first in her fiction and then on annual research trips for each new novel. Dinah Jefferies is the author of four novels, *The Separation*, *The Tea Planter's Wife* - a Number One Sunday Times bestseller, *The Silk Merchant's Daughter* and *Before the Rains*. She lives in Gloucestershire.

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Part One

The New Life

1

Twelve Years Later: Ceylon, 1925

With her straw sun hat in one hand, Gwen leaned against the salty railings and glanced down again. She'd been watching the shifting color of the sea for an hour, tracing the shreds of paper, the curls of orange peel, and the leaves drifting by. Now that the water had changed from deepest turquoise to dingy gray, she knew it couldn't be long. She leaned a little further over the rail to watch a piece of silver fabric float out of sight.

When the ship's horn sounded—loud, prolonged, and very close—she jumped, lifting her hand from the rail in surprise. The little satin purse, a farewell present from her mother, with its delicate beaded drawstring, slid over her hand. She gasped and reached out, but saw it was too late as the purse dropped into the ocean, swirled in the dirty water, and then sank. And with it her money, and Laurence's letter with his instructions folded neatly inside.

She looked about her and felt another stirring of the unease she hadn't been able to shake off since leaving England. You can't get much further from Gloucestershire than Ceylon, her father had said. As his voice echoed in her head, she was startled when she heard another voice, distinctly male but with an unusually honeyed tone.

"New to the East?"

Accustomed to the fact that her violet eyes and pale complexion always attracted attention, she turned to look and was forced to squint into bright sunlight.

"I .??. Yes. I'm joining my husband. We're only recently married." She took a breath, just stopping herself from blurting out the whole story.

A broad-shouldered man of medium height, with a strong nose and glittering caramel eyes, gazed back at her. His black brows, curling hair, and dark polished skin stopped her in her tracks. She stared, feeling a little unnerved, until he smiled in an open sort of way.

"You're lucky. By May the sea would normally be a great deal wilder. A tea planter, I'm guessing," he said. "Your husband."

"How did you know?"

He spread his hands. "There is a type."

She glanced down at her beige-colored dress: drop-waisted, but with a high collar and long sleeves. She didn't want to be a "type," but realized that if it weren't for the chiffon scarf knotted at her neck, she might appear drab.

"I saw what happened. I'm sorry about your purse."

"It was stupid of me," she said, and hoped she wasn't blushing.

Had she been a little more like her cousin, Fran, she might have engaged him in conversation, but instead, imagining the short exchange to be over, she turned back to watch as the ship slipped closer to Colombo.

Above the shimmering city, a cobalt sky stretched into distant purple hills; trees gave shade and the air was filled with the cries of gulls as they swooped over the small boats massing on the water. The thrill of doing something so different bubbled through her. She had missed Laurence and, for a moment, allowed herself to dream of him. Dreaming was effortless, but the reality was so exciting it set butterflies alight in her stomach. She took a deep breath of what she'd expected would be salty air and marveled at the scent of something stronger than salt.

"What is that?" she said as she turned to look at the man, who, she rightly sensed, had not shifted from the spot.

He paused and sniffed deeply. "Cinnamon and probably sandalwood."

"There's something sweet."

"Jasmine flowers. There are many flowers in Ceylon."

"How lovely," she said. But even then, she knew it was more than that. Beneath the seductive scent there was an undercurrent of something sour.

"Bad drains too, I'm afraid."

She nodded. Perhaps that was it.

“I haven’t introduced myself. My name is Savi Ravasinghe.”

“Oh.” She paused. “You’re .??. I mean, I haven’t seen you at dinner.”

He pulled a face. “Not a first-class passenger is what you mean, I think. I’m Sinhalese.”

She hadn’t noticed until now that the man stood on the other side of the rope that separated the classes. “Well, it’s very nice to meet you,” she said, pulling off one of her white gloves. “I’m Gwendolyn Hooper.”

“Then you must be Laurence Hooper’s new wife.”

She fingered the large Ceylon sapphire of her ring and nodded in surprise. “You know my husband?”

He inclined his head. “I have met your husband, yes, but now I’m afraid I must take my leave.”

She held out her hand, pleased to have met him.

“I hope you’ll be very happy in Ceylon, Mrs. Hooper.”

When he ignored her hand, she let it fall. He pressed his palms together in front of his chest, fingers pointing upward, and bowed very slightly.

“May your dreams be fulfilled .??.” With closed eyes, he paused for a moment, then walked off.

Gwen felt a little disconcerted by his words and the odd departing gesture, but with more pressing matters on her mind, she shrugged. She really must try to remember Laurence’s lost instructions.

Luckily, first class disembarked first, and that meant her. She thought of the man again and couldn’t help but feel fascinated. She’d never met anyone so exotic and it would have been much more fun if he’d stayed to keep her company—though, of course, he could not.

Nothing had prepared her for the shock of Ceylon’s scorching heat, nor its clashing colors, nor the contrast between the bright white light and the depth of the shade. Noise bombarded her: bells, horns, people, and buzzing insects surrounding her, swirling and eddying, until she felt as if she were being tipped about, like one of the pieces of flotsam she’d been watching earlier. When the background noise was eclipsed by loud trumpeting, she spun round to stare at the timber wharf, mesmerized by the sight of an elephant raising its trunk in the air and bellowing.

When watching an elephant had become quite normal, she braved the Port Authority building, made arrangements for her trunk, then sat on a wooden bench in the hot steamy air with nothing but her hat to shade her, and with which, from time to time, she swatted the clusters of flies that crawled along her hairline. Laurence had promised to be at the dockside, but so far there was no sign of him. She tried to recall what he’d said to do in the event of an emergency, and spotted Mr. Ravasinghe again, making his way out of the second-class hatch in the side of the ship. By avoiding looking at the man, she hoped to hide her flush of embarrassment at her predicament, and turned the other way to watch the haphazard loading of tea chests onto a barge at the other end of the docks.

The smell of drains had long since overpowered the spicy fragrance of cinnamon and now mingled with other rank odors: grease, bullock dung, rotting fish. And as the dockside filled with more disgruntled passengers being besieged by traders and hawkers peddling gemstones and silk, she felt sick with nerves. What would she do if Laurence didn't come? He had promised. She was only nineteen, and he knew she'd never been further from Owl Tree Manor than a trip or two to London with Fran. Her spirits sank. It was too bad her cousin hadn't been able to travel out with her, but straight after the wedding Fran had been called away by her solicitor, and though Gwen would have entrusted Laurence with her life, all things considered, she couldn't help feeling a bit upset.

A swarm of seminaked brown-skinned children flitted among the crowd, offering bundles of cinnamon sticks, and with enormous, imploring eyes, begged for rupees. A child who couldn't have been more than five pulled out a bundle for Gwen. She held it to her nose and sniffed. The child spoke, but it was gobbledegook to Gwen, and sadly she had no rupees to give the urchin, nor any English money either, now.

She stood and walked about. There was a brief gust of wind, and from somewhere in the distance came a troubling sound—boom, boom, boom. Drums, she thought. Loud, but not quite loud enough to identify a regular beat. She didn't wander far from the small case she'd left by the bench, and when she heard Mr. Ravasinghe call out, she felt her forehead bead with perspiration.

"Mrs. Hooper. You cannot leave your case unguarded."

She wiped her forehead with the back of her hand. "I was keeping my eye on it."

"People are poor and opportunistic. Come, I'll carry your case and find you somewhere cooler to wait."

"You're very kind."

"Not at all." He held her by the elbow with just his fingertips and forged a path through the Port Authority building. "This is Church Street. Now look over there—just at the edge of Gordon Gardens is the Suriya, or tulip tree as it is known."

She glanced at the tree. Its fat trunk folded deeply like a woman's skirt, and a canopy studded with bright orange bell-shaped flowers offered an oddly flaming kind of shade.

"It will provide a degree of cool, though with the afternoon heat coming on so strong, and the monsoon not yet arrived, you will find little relief."

"Really," she said. "There's no need for you to stay with me."

He smiled and his eyes narrowed. "I cannot leave you here alone, a penniless stranger in our city."

Glad of his company, she smiled back.

They walked across to the spot he'd indicated, and she spent another hour leaning against the tree, perspiring and dripping beneath her clothes, and wondering what she'd let herself in for by agreeing to live in Ceylon. The noise had amplified, and though he stood close, hemmed in by the crowds, he still had to shout to be heard.

"If your husband has not arrived by three, I hope you won't mind my suggesting you retire to the Galle Face

Hotel to wait. It is airy, there are fans and soft drinks, and you will be infinitely cooler.”

She hesitated, reluctant to leave the spot. “But how will Laurence know I’m there?”

“He’ll know. Anyone British of any standing goes to the Galle Face.”

She glanced at the imposing façade of the Grand Oriental. “Not there?”

“Definitely not there. Trust me.”

In the fierce brightness of the afternoon, the wind blew a cloud of grit into her face, sending tears streaming down her cheeks. She blinked rapidly, then rubbed her eyes, hoping she really could trust him. Perhaps he was right. A person could die in this heat.

A short distance from where she stood, a tight bundle had formed beneath rows and rows of fluttering white ribbons strung across the street, and a man in brown robes, making a repetitive high-pitched sound, stood in the center of a group of colorful women. Mr. Ravasinghe saw Gwen watching.

“The monk is pirith chanting,” he said. “It is often required at the deathbed to ensure a good passing. Here I think it is because great evil may have transpired at that spot, or at the very least a death. The monk is attempting to purify the place of any remaining malignancy by calling for the blessings of the gods. We believe in ghosts in Ceylon.”

“You are all Buddhists?”

“I myself am, but there are Hindus and Muslims too.”

“And Christians?”

He inclined his head.

When by three there was still no sign of Laurence, the man held out a hand and took a step away. “Well?”

She nodded, and he called out to one of the rickshaw men, who wore very little more than a turban and a greasy-looking loincloth.

She shuddered at how thin the man’s brown naked back was. “I’m surely not going in that?”

“Would you prefer a bullock cart?”

She felt herself redden as she glanced at the heap of oval orange fruits piled up in a cart that had huge wooden wheels and a matted canopy.

“I do beg your pardon, Mrs. Hooper. I shouldn’t tease. Your husband uses carts to transport the tea chests. We would actually ride in a small buggy. Just the one bullock and with a shady palm-leaf hood.”

She pointed at the orange fruits. “What are those?”

“King coconut. Only for the juice. Are you thirsty?”

Even though she was, she shook her head. On the wall just behind Mr. Ravasinghe, a large poster showed a dark-skinned woman balancing a wicker basket on her head and wearing a yellow and red sari. She had bare feet and gold bangles on her ankles and she wore a yellow headscarf. mazzawattee tea, the poster proclaimed. Gwen's hands grew clammy and a flood of sickening panic swept through her. She was very far from home.

"As you can see," Mr. Ravasinghe was saying, "cars are few and far between, and a rickshaw is certainly faster. If you are unhappy, we can wait, and I'll try to obtain a horse and carriage. Or, if it helps, I can accompany you in the rickshaw."

At that moment, a large black car came hooting its way through the crowd of pedestrians, bicyclists, carts, and carriages, only narrowly missing numerous sleeping dogs. Laurence, she thought with a surge of relief, but when she looked in through the window of the passing vehicle, she saw it contained only two large middle-aged European women. One turned to look at Gwen, her face a picture of disapproval.

Right, Gwen thought, galvanized into action, a rickshaw it is.

A cluster of thin palms stood waving in the breeze outside the Galle Face Hotel, and the building itself sided the ocean in a very British way. When Mr. Ravasinghe had given her the oriental manner of salutation and a very warm smile, she was sorry to see him go but walked past the two curved staircases and settled herself to wait in the relative cool of the Palm Lounge. She instantly felt at home and closed her eyes, pleased to have a small respite from the almost total invasion of her senses. Her rest didn't last long. If Laurence were to arrive now, she was only too aware of the sorry state she was in, and that was not the impression she wanted to create. She sipped her cup of Ceylon tea, and then looked across the tables and chairs dotted about the polished teak floor. In one corner a discreet sign pinpointed the location of the ladies' powder room.

In the sweet-smelling, multiple-mirrored room, she splashed the repeated image of her face and applied a dab of *Après L'Ondée*, which luckily had been safely stowed in her small case and not in her drowned purse. She felt sticky, with sweat running down under her arms, but pinned up her hair again so that it coiled neatly at the nape of her neck. Her hair was her crowning glory, Laurence said. It was dark, long, and ringleted when unpinned. When she'd mentioned she was considering having it cut short like Fran's, flapper style, he'd looked horrified and tugged loose a curl at the back of her neck, then leaned down and rubbed his chin on top of her head.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Diane Gonzales:

What do you in relation to book? It is not important along with you? Or just adding material when you require something to explain what your own problem? How about your free time? Or are you busy man? If you don't have spare time to try and do others business, it is give you a sense of feeling bored faster. And you have spare time? What did you do? Everyone has many questions above. They have to answer that question mainly because just their can do that will. It said that about publication. Book is familiar in each person. Yes, it is suitable. Because start from on jardín de infancia until university need that *The Tea Planter's Wife* to read.

Mildred Olsen:

The guide untitled The Tea Planter's Wife is the guide that recommended to you to learn. You can see the quality of the guide content that will be shown to anyone. The language that article author use to explained their way of doing something is easily to understand. The article author was did a lot of study when write the book, and so the information that they share to you is absolutely accurate. You also will get the e-book of The Tea Planter's Wife from the publisher to make you considerably more enjoy free time.

Patricia Baker:

Spent a free the perfect time to be fun activity to accomplish! A lot of people spent their free time with their family, or their own friends. Usually they undertaking activity like watching television, gonna beach, or picnic inside the park. They actually doing same thing every week. Do you feel it? Do you want to something different to fill your own personal free time/ holiday? Could possibly be reading a book can be option to fill your totally free time/ holiday. The first thing you ask may be what kinds of reserve that you should read. If you want to try look for book, may be the book untitled The Tea Planter's Wife can be very good book to read. May be it may be best activity to you.

Abigail Shelton:

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