

# The Garden Party

(NZL) *Katherine Mansfield*

AND after all the weather was ideal. They could not have had a more perfect day for a garden-party if they had ordered it. Windless, warm, the sky without a cloud. Only the blue was veiled<sup>1</sup> with a haze<sup>2</sup> of light gold, as it is sometimes in early summer. The gardener had been up since dawn, mowing<sup>3</sup> the lawns<sup>4</sup> and sweeping them, until the grass and the dark flat rosettes<sup>5</sup> where the daisy<sup>6</sup> plants had been seemed to shine. As for the roses, you could not help feeling they understood that roses are the only flowers that impress people at garden-parties; the only flowers that everybody is certain of knowing. Hundreds, yes, literally hundreds, had come out in a single night; the green bushes bowed<sup>7</sup> down as though they had been visited by archangels.

Breakfast was not yet over before men came to

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<sup>1</sup>**veil** v. to cover sth with sth that hides it partly or completely

<sup>2</sup>**haze** n. air containing sth that makes it difficult to see through it

<sup>3</sup>**mow** v. to cut grass etc. using a machine or tool with a special blade or blades

<sup>4</sup>**lawn** n. an area of ground in short grass in a garden/yard or park, or used for playing a game

<sup>5</sup>**rosette** n. a thing that has the shape of a rose

<sup>6</sup>**daisy** n. a small wild flower with white petals around a yellow centre

<sup>7</sup>**bow** v. to bend or make sth bend

put up the marquee<sup>8</sup>.

“Where do you want the marquee put, mother?”

“My dear child, it’s no use asking me. I’m determined to leave everything to you children this year. Forget I am your mother. Treat me as an honoured guest.”

But Meg could not possibly go and supervise the men. She had washed her hair before breakfast, and she sat drinking her coffee in a green turban<sup>9</sup>, with a dark wet curl stamped on each cheek<sup>10</sup>. Jose, the butterfly, always came down in a silk petticoat<sup>11</sup> and a kimono<sup>12</sup> jacket.

“You’ll have to go, Laura; you’re the artistic one.”

Away Laura flew, still holding her piece of bread-and-butter. It’s so delicious to have an excuse for eating out of doors and besides, she loved to arrange things; she always felt she could do it so much better than anybody else.

Four men in their shirt-sleeves<sup>13</sup> stood grouped

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<sup>8</sup>**marquee** n. a large tent used at social events

<sup>9</sup>**turban** n. a long piece of fabric wound tightly around the head or a woman’s hat that looks like it

<sup>10</sup>**cheek** n. either side of the face below the eyes

<sup>11</sup>**petticoat** n. a piece of women’s underwear like a thin dress or skirt, worn under a dress or skirt

<sup>12</sup>**kimono** n. a traditional Japanese piece of clothing like a long loose dress with wide sleeves, worn on formal occasions

<sup>13</sup>**sleeve** n. a part of a piece of clothing that covers all or

together on the garden path. They carried staves<sup>14</sup> covered with rolls of canvas<sup>15</sup>, and they had big tool-bags slung on their backs. They looked impressive. Laura wished now that she had not got the bread-and-butter, but there was nowhere to put it, and she couldn't possibly throw it away. She blushed<sup>16</sup> and tried to look severe<sup>17</sup> and even a little bit short-sighted as she came up to them.

“Good morning,” she said, copying her mother's voice. But that sounded so fearfully affected that she was ashamed, and stammered<sup>18</sup> like a little girl, “Oh—er—have you come—is it about the marquee?”

“That's right, miss,” said the tallest of the men, a lanky<sup>19</sup> freckled<sup>20</sup> fellow, and he shifted his tool-bag,

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part of your arm

<sup>14</sup>**stave** n. a set of five lines on which music is written

<sup>15</sup>**canvas** n. a strong heavy rough fabric used for making tents, sails, etc. and by artists for painting on

<sup>16</sup>**blush** v. to become red in the face because you are embarrassed or ashamed

<sup>17</sup>**severe** adj. not kind or sympathetic and showing disapproval of sb/sth

<sup>18</sup>**stammer** v. to speak with difficulty, repeating sounds or words and often stopping, before saying things correctly

<sup>19</sup>**lanky** adj. having long thin limbs and moving in an awkward way

<sup>20</sup>**freckled** adj. with a small, pale brown spot on a person's skin, especially on their face, caused by the sun

knocked back his straw<sup>21</sup> hat and smiled down at her.

“That’s about it.”

His smile was so easy, so friendly that Laura recovered. What nice eyes he had, small, but such a dark blue! And now she looked at the others, they were smiling too. “Cheer up, we won’t bite,” their smile seemed to say. How very nice workmen were! And what a beautiful morning! She mustn’t mention the morning; she must be business-like. The marquee.

“Well, what about the lily-lawn? Would that do?”

And she pointed to the lily-lawn with the hand that didn’t hold the bread-and-butter. They turned, they stared in the direction. A little fat chap<sup>22</sup> thrust<sup>23</sup> out his under-lip, and the tall fellow frowned<sup>24</sup>.

“I don’t fancy<sup>25</sup> it,” said he. “Not conspicuous<sup>26</sup> enough. You see, with a thing like a marquee,” and he turned to Laura in his easy way, “you want to put

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<sup>21</sup>**straw** n. stems of wheat or other grain plants that have been cut and dried

<sup>22</sup>**chap** n. used to talk about a man in a friendly way

<sup>23</sup>**thrust** v. to push sth/sb suddenly or violently in a particular direction; to move quickly and suddenly in a particular direction

<sup>24</sup>**frown** v. to make a serious, angry or worried expression by bring your eyebrows closer together so that lines appear on your forehead

<sup>25</sup>**fancy** v. to want sth or want to do sth

<sup>26</sup>**conspicuous** adj. easy to see or notice

it somewhere where it'll give you a bang slap in the eye, if you follow me."

Laura's upbringing<sup>27</sup> made her wonder for a moment whether it was quite respectful of a workman to talk to her of bangs slap in the eye. But she did quite follow him.

"A corner of the tennis-court," she suggested. "But the band's going to be in one corner."

"H'm, going to have a band, are you?" said another of the workmen. He was pale<sup>28</sup>. He had a haggard<sup>29</sup> look as his dark eyes scanned the tennis-court. What was he thinking?

"Only a very small band," said Laura gently. Perhaps he wouldn't mind so much if the band was quite small. But the tall fellow interrupted.

"Look here, miss, that's the place. Against those trees. Over there. That'll do fine."

Against the karakas<sup>30</sup>. Then the karaka-trees would

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<sup>27</sup>**upbringing** n. the way in which a child is cared for and taught how to behave while it is growing up

<sup>28</sup>**pale** adj. having skin that is almost white; having skin that is whiter than usual because of illness, a strong emotion, etc.

<sup>29</sup>**haggard** adj. looking very tired because of illness, worry or lack of sleep

<sup>30</sup>**karaka** n. karaka (*Corynocarpus laevigatus*) is an evergreen tree of the family Corynocarpaceae endemic to New Zealand

be hidden. And they were so lovely, with their broad, gleaming<sup>31</sup> leaves, and their clusters of yellow fruit. They were like trees you imagined growing on a desert island, proud, solitary<sup>32</sup>, lifting their leaves and fruits to the sun in a kind of silent splendour<sup>33</sup>. Must they be hidden by a marquee?

They must. Already the men had shouldered their staves and were making for the place, pinched<sup>34</sup> a sprig<sup>35</sup> of lavender, put his thumb and forefinger to his nose and snuffed<sup>36</sup> up the smell. When Laura saw that gesture she forgot all about the karakas in her wonder at him caring for things like that—caring for the smell of lavender. How many men that she knew would have done such a thing? Oh, how extraordinarily nice workmen were, she thought. Why couldn't she have workmen for friends rather than the silly boys she danced with and who came to Sunday night supper? She would get on much better with men like

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<sup>31</sup>**gleam** v. to shine with a pale clear light

<sup>32</sup>**solitary** adj. alone, with no other people or things around

<sup>33</sup>**splendour** n. grand and impressive beauty

<sup>34</sup>**pinch** v. to hold sth tightly between the thumb and finger of between two things that are pressed together

<sup>35</sup>**sprig** n. a small stem with leaves on it from a plant or bush, used in cooking or as a decoration

<sup>36</sup>**snuff** v. to smell sth by breathing in noisily through the nose

these.

It's all the fault, she decided, as the tall fellow drew something on the back of an envelope, something that was to be looped up or left to hang, of these absurd<sup>37</sup> class distinctions<sup>38</sup>. Well, for her part, she didn't feel them. Not a bit, not an atom... And now there came the chock-chock of wooden hammers. Some one whistled, some one sang out, "Are you right there, matey<sup>39</sup>?" "Matey!" The friendliness of it, the—the— Just to prove how happy she was, just to show tha tall fellow how at home she felt, and how she despised<sup>40</sup> stupid conventions<sup>41</sup>, Laura took a big bite of her bread-and-butter as she stared at the little drawing. She felt just like a work-girl.

"Laura, Laura, where are you? Telephone, Laura!" a voice cried from the house.

"Coming!" Away she skimmed<sup>42</sup>, over the lawn,

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<sup>37</sup>**absurd** adj. completely ridiculous; not logical and sensible

<sup>38</sup>**distinction** n. a clear difference or contrast especially between people or things that are similar or related

<sup>39</sup>**matey** n. used by men as an informal way of addressing another man

<sup>40</sup>**despise** v. to dislike and have on respect for sb/sth

<sup>41</sup>**convention** n. the way in which sth is done that most people in a society expect and consider to be polite or the right way to do it; a large meeting of the members of a profession, a political party, etc.

<sup>42</sup>**skim** v. to move quickly and lightly over a surface, not



up the path, up the steps, across the veranda<sup>43</sup>, and into the porch<sup>44</sup>. In the hall her father and Laurie were brushing their hats ready to go to the office.

“I say, Laura,” said Laurie very fast, “you might just give a squiz<sup>45</sup> at my coat before this afternoon. See if it wants pressing.”

“I will,” said she. Suddenly she couldn’t stop herself. She ran at Laurie and gave him a small, quick squeeze. “Oh, I do love parties, don’t you?” gasped<sup>46</sup> Laura.

“Rather,” said Laurie’s warm, boyish voice, and he squeezed his sister too, and gave her a gentle push. “Dash<sup>47</sup> off to the telephone, old girl.”

The telephone. “Yes, yes; oh yes. Kitty? Good morning, dear. Come to lunch? Do, dear. Delighted<sup>48</sup> of course. It will only be a very scratch<sup>49</sup> meal—just

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touching it or only touching it occasionally

<sup>43</sup>**veranda** n. a platform with an open front and a roof, built onto the side of a house on the ground floor

<sup>44</sup>**porch** n. a small area at the entrance to a building, such as a house or a church, that is covered by a roof and often has walls

<sup>45</sup>**squiz** (AUS/NZL) n. a look or glance

<sup>46</sup>**gasp** v. to take a quick deep breath with your mouth open, especially because you are surprised or in pain

<sup>47</sup>**dash** v. to go somewhere very quickly

<sup>48</sup>**delighted** adj. very pleased

<sup>49</sup>**scratch** adj. put together in a hurry using whatever people

the sandwich crusts<sup>50</sup> and broken meringue<sup>51</sup>-shells and what's left over. Yes, isn't it a perfect morning? Your white? Oh, I certainly should. One moment—hold the line. Mother's calling.” And Laura sat back. “What, mother? Can't hear.”

Mrs. Sheridan's voice floated down the stairs. “Tell her to wear that sweet hat she had on last Sunday.”

“Mother says you're to wear that *sweet* hat you had on last Sunday. Good. One o'clock. Bye-bye.”

Laura put back the receiver, flung<sup>52</sup> her arms over her head, took a deep breath, stretched and let them fall. “Huh,” she sighed, and the moment after the sigh she sat up quickly. She was still, listening. All the doors in the house seemed to be open. The house was alive with soft, quick steps and running voices. The green baize<sup>53</sup> door that led to the kitchen regions

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or materials are available

<sup>50</sup>**crust** n. the harder outer surface of bread

<sup>51</sup>**meringue** n. a sweet white mixture made from egg whites and sugar, usually baked until crisp and used to make cakes

<sup>52</sup>**fling** v. (pt./pp. **flung**) to throw sb/sth somewhere with force, especially because you are angry

<sup>53</sup>**baize** n. a thick wollern fabric that is usually green, used especially for covering card tables and billiard, snooker or pool tables

swung open and shut with a muffled<sup>54</sup> thud<sup>55</sup>. And now there came a long, chuckling<sup>56</sup> absurd sound. It was the heavy piano being moved on its stiff castors. But the air! If you stopped to notice, was the air always like this? Little faint winds were playing chase<sup>57</sup>, in at the tops of the windows, out at the doors. And there were two tiny spots of sun, one on the inkpot, one on a silver photograph frame, playing too. Darling little spots. Especially the one on the inkpot lid. It was quite warm. A warm silver star. She could have kissed it.

The front door bell pealed<sup>58</sup>, and there sounded the rustle<sup>59</sup> of Sadie's print skirt on the stairs. A man's voice murmured<sup>60</sup>; Sadie answered, careless, "I'm sure I don't know. Wait. I'll ask Mrs. Sheridan."

"What is it, Sadie?" Laura came into the hall.

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<sup>54</sup>**muffled** adj. not hear clearly because sth is in the way that stops the sound from travelling easily

<sup>55</sup>**thud** n. a sound like the one which is made when a heavy object hits sth else

<sup>56</sup>**chuckle** v. to laugh quietly

<sup>57</sup>**chase** n. an act of running or driving after sb/sth in order to catch them; hunting animals as a sport

<sup>58</sup>**peal** v. to ring loudly

<sup>59</sup>**rustle** n. a light dry sound like paper, leaves, etc. moving or rubbing together

<sup>60</sup>**murmur** v. to say sth in a soft quiet voice that is difficult to hear or understand

“It’s the florist, Miss Laura.”

It was, indeed. There, just inside the door, stood a wide, shallow<sup>61</sup> tray full of pots of pink lilies. No other kind. Nothing but lilies—canna<sup>62</sup> lilies, big pink flowers, wide open, radiant<sup>63</sup>, almost frighteningly<sup>64</sup> alive on bright crimson<sup>65</sup> stems.

“O-oh, Sadie!” said Laura, and the sound was like a little moan<sup>66</sup>. She crouched<sup>67</sup> down as if to warm herself at that blaze<sup>68</sup> of lilies; she felt they were in her fingers, on her lips, growing in her breast.

“It’s some mistake,” she said faintly. “Nobody ever ordered so many. Sadie, go and find mother.”

But at that moment Mrs. Sheridan joined them.

“It’s quite right,” she said calmly. “Yes, I ordered them. Aren’t they lovely?” She pressed Laura’s arm.

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<sup>61</sup>**shallow** adj. not having much distance between the top or surface and the bottom

<sup>62</sup>**canna** n. canna (or canna lily, although not a true lily) is a genus of 19 species of flowering plants

<sup>63</sup>**radiant** adj. showing great happiness, love or health; giving a warm bright light

<sup>64</sup>**frightening** adj. making you feel afraid

<sup>65</sup>**crimson** adj. dark red in color

<sup>66</sup>**moan** n. a long, low sound that someone makes because of pain, unhappiness, or physical pleasure

<sup>67</sup>**crouch** v. to lower your body to the ground by bending your legs

<sup>68</sup>**blaze** n. an intense and dangerous fire

“I was passing the shop yesterday, and I saw them in the window. And I suddenly thought for once in my life I shall have enough canna lilies. The garden-party will be a good excuse.”

“But I thought you said you didn’t mean to interfere<sup>69</sup>,” said Laura. Sadie has gone. The florist’s man was still outside at his van<sup>70</sup>. She put her arm round her mother’s neck and gently, very gently, she bit her mother’s ear.

“My darling child, you wouldn’t like a logical mother, would you? Don’t do that. Here’s the man.”

He carried more lilies still, another whole tray.

“Bank them up, just inside the door, on both sides of the porch, please,” said Mrs. Sheridan. “Don’t you agree, Laura?”

“Oh, I *do*, mother.”

In the drawing-room Meg, Jose and good little Hans had at last succeeded in moving the piano.

“Now, if we put this chesterfield<sup>71</sup> against the wall and move everything out of the room except the

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<sup>69</sup>**interfere** v. to become involved in the activities and concerns of other people when your involvement is not wanted

<sup>70</sup>**van** n. a vehicle that is used for transporting goods and that is closed in on all sides

<sup>71</sup>**chesterfield** n. a couch, sofa, or loveseat with padded arms and back of the same height, often curved outward at the top

chairs, don't you think?"

"Quite."

"Hans, move these tables into the smoking-room, and bring a sweeper to take these marks off the carpet<sup>72</sup> and—one moment, Hans—" Jose loved giving orders to the servants, and they loved obeying her. She always made them feel they were taking part in some drama. "Tell mother and Miss Laura to come here at once."

"Very good, Miss Jose."

She turned to Meg. "I want to hear what the piano sounds like, just in case I'm asked to sing this afternoon. Let's try over 'This Life is Weary'."

*Pom! Ta-ta-ta Tee-ta!* The piano burst out so passionately<sup>73</sup> that Jose's face changed. She clasped<sup>74</sup> her hands. She looked mournfully<sup>75</sup> and enigmatically<sup>76</sup> at her mother and Laura as they came in.

*This Life is Wee-ary,  
A Tear—a Sigh.*

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<sup>72</sup>**carpet** n. a heavy fabric cover for a floor

<sup>73</sup>**passionate** adj. having, showing, or expressing strong emotions or beliefs

<sup>74</sup>**clasp** v. to hold sb/sth tightly with your hands or arms

<sup>75</sup>**mournful** adj. full of sorrow

<sup>76</sup>**enigmatical** adj. full of mystery and difficult to understand

*A Love that Chan-ges,  
This Life is Wee-ary,  
A Tear—a Sigh.  
A Love that Chan-ges,  
And then...Goodbye!*

But at the word “Good-bye”, and although the piano sounded more desperate<sup>77</sup> than ever, her face broke into a brilliant<sup>78</sup>, dreadfully<sup>79</sup> unsympathetic<sup>80</sup> smile.

“Aren’t I in good voice, mummy?” she beamed.

*This Life is Wee-ary,  
Hope comes to Die.  
A Dream—a Wa-kening.*

But now Sadie interrupted them. “What is it, Sadie?”

“If you please, m’m, cook says have you got the flags for the sandwiches?”

“The flags for the sandwiches, Sadie?” echoed Mrs. Sheridan dreamily. And the children knew by

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<sup>77</sup>**desperate** adj. feeling or showing despair

<sup>78</sup>**brilliant** adj. very bright; very impressive or successful

<sup>79</sup>**dreadful** adj. very bad or unpleasant

<sup>80</sup>**unsympathetic** adj. not sympathetic; not feeling or showing concern about someone who is in a bad situation

her face that she hadn't got them. "Let me see." And she said to Sadie firmly, "Tell cook I'll let her have them in ten minutes."

Sadie went.

"Now, Laura," said her mother quickly. "Come with me into the smoking-room. I've got the names somewhere on the back of an envelope. You'll have to write them out for me. Meg, go upstairs this minute and take that wet thing off your head. Jose, run and finish dressing this instant. Do you hear me, children, or shall I have to tell your father when he comes home tonight? And—and, Jose, pacify<sup>81</sup> cook if you do go into the kitchen, will you? I'm terrified of her this morning."

The envelope was found at last behind the dining-room clock, though how it had got there Mrs. Sheridan could not imagine.

"One of you children must have stolen it out of my bag, because I rememver vividly—cream cheese and lemon-curd. Have you done that?"

"Yes."

"Egg and—" Mrs. Sheridan held the envelope away from her. "It looks like mice. It can't be mice, can it?"

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<sup>81</sup>**pacify** v. to cause (someone who is angry or upset) to become calm or quiet



“Olive<sup>82</sup>, pet,” said Laura, looking over her shoulder.

“Yes, of course, olive. What a horrible combination it sounds. Egg and olive.”

They were finished at last, and Laura took them off to the kitchen. She found Jose there pacifying the cook, who did not look at all terrifying<sup>83</sup>.

“I have never seen such exquisite<sup>84</sup> sandwiches,” said Jose’s rapturous<sup>85</sup> voice. “How many kinds did you say there were, cook? Fifteen?”

“Fifteen, Miss Jose.”

“Well, cook, I congratulate you.”

Cook swept up crusts with the long sandwich knife, and smiled broadly.

“Godber’s has come,” announced Sadie, issuing out of the pantry<sup>86</sup>. She had seen the man pass the window.

That meant the cream puffs<sup>87</sup> had come. Godber’s were famous for their cream puffs. Nobody ever

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<sup>82</sup>**olive** n. a small, egg-shaped black or green fruit that is used as food or for making oil

<sup>83</sup>**terrify** v. to cause (sb) to be extremely afraid

<sup>84</sup>**exquisite** adj. finely done or made

<sup>85</sup>**rapturous** adj. showing extreme pleasure, love, or enthusiasm for someone or sth

<sup>86</sup>**pantry** n. a small room in a house in which food is stored

<sup>87</sup>**puff** n. a light, round pastry that contains a sweet filling

thought of making them at home.

“Bring them in and put them on the table, my girl,” ordered cook.

Sadie brought them in and went back to the door. Of course Laura and Jose were far too grown-up to really care about such things. All the same, they couldn’t help agreeing that the puffs looked very attractive. Very. Cook began arranging them, shaking off the extra icing sugar.

“Don’t the carry one back to all one’s parties?” said Laura.

“I suppose they do,” said practical Jose, who never liked to be carried back. “They look beautifully light and feathery<sup>88</sup>, I must say.”

“Have one each, my dears,” said cook in her comfortable voice. “Yer ma won’t know.”

Oh, impossible. Fancy cream puffs so soon after breakfast. The very idea made one shudder<sup>89</sup>. All the same, two minutes later Jose and Laura were licking<sup>90</sup> their fingers with that absorbed<sup>91</sup> inward look that only comes from whipped<sup>92</sup> cream.

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<sup>88</sup>**feathery** adj. extremely light and soft or delicate

<sup>89</sup>**shudder** v. to shake because of fear, cold, etc.

<sup>90</sup>**lick** v. to pass the tongue over

<sup>91</sup>**absorb** v. to take up the whole interest or attention of (someone)

<sup>92</sup>**whip** v. to move quickly or forcefully

“Let’s go into the garden, out by the back way,” suggested Laura. “I want to see how the men are getting on with the marquee. They’re such awfully nice men.”

But the back door was blocked by cook, Sadie, Godber’s man and Hans.

Something had happened.

“Tuk-tuk-tuk,” clucked<sup>93</sup> cook like an agitated<sup>94</sup> hen, Sadie had her hand clapped to her cheek as though she had toothache. Hans’s face was screwed up in the effort to understand. Only Godber’s man seemed to be enjoying himself; it was his story.

“What’s the matter? What’s happened?”

“There’s been a horrible accident,” said cook. “A man killed.”

“A man killed! Where? How? When?”

But Godber’s man wasn’t going to have his story snatched<sup>95</sup> from under his very nose.

“Know those little cottages just below here, miss?” Know them? Of course, she knew them. “Well, there’s a young chap living there, name of Scott, a carter<sup>96</sup>. His horse shied at a traction<sup>97</sup>-engine, corner of Hawke

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<sup>93</sup>**cluck** v. to make a low sound with the tongue

<sup>94</sup>**agitate** v. to disturb, excite, or anger (someone)

<sup>95</sup>**snatch** v. to take (sth) quickly or eagerly

<sup>96</sup>**carter** n. a person who hauls goods in a cart

<sup>97</sup>**traction** n. the force that causes a moving thing to stick

Street this morning, and he was thrown out on the back of his head. Killed.”

“Dead!” Laura stared at Godber’s man.

“Dead when they picked him up,” said Godber’s man with relish<sup>98</sup>. “They were taking the body home as I come up here.” And he said to the cook, “He’s left a wife and five little ones.”

“Jose, come here.” Laura caught hold of her sister’s sleeve and dragged her through the kitchen to the other side of the green baize door. There she paused and leaned<sup>99</sup> against it. “Jose!” she said, horrified<sup>100</sup>, “however are we going to stop everything?”

“Stop everything, Laura!” cried Jose in astonishment<sup>101</sup>. “What do you mean?”

“Stop the garden-party, of course.” Why did Jose pretend?

But Jose was still more amazed. “Stop the garden-party? My dear Laura, don’t be so absurd. Of course we can’t do anything of the kind. Nobody expects us to. Don’t be so extravagant<sup>102</sup>.”

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against the surface it is moving along

<sup>98</sup>**relish** n. enjoyment of or delight in sth

<sup>99</sup>**lean** v. to bend or move from a straight position

<sup>100</sup>**horrify** v. to cause (someone) to feel horror or shock

<sup>101</sup>**astonishment** n. a feeling of being very surprised

<sup>102</sup>**extravagant** adj. more than is usual, necessary, or proper

“But we can’t possibly have a garden-party with a man dead just outside the front gate.”

That really was extravagant, for the little cottages were in a lane<sup>103</sup> to themselves at the very bottom of a steep<sup>104</sup> rise that led up to the house. A broad road ran between. True, they were far too near. They were the greatest possible eyesore<sup>105</sup>, and they had no right to be in the neighbourhood at all. They were little mean dwellings<sup>106</sup> painted a chocolate brown. In the garden patches there was nothing but cabbage stalks<sup>107</sup>, sick hens and tomato cans. The very smoke coming out of their chimneys<sup>108</sup> was poverty-stricken. Little rags<sup>109</sup> and shreds<sup>110</sup> of smoke, so unlike the great silvery<sup>111</sup> plumes<sup>112</sup> that uncurled<sup>113</sup> from the

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<sup>103</sup>**lane** n. a narrow road or path

<sup>104</sup>**steep** adj. almost straight up and down

<sup>105</sup>**eyesore** n. an ugly object or building

<sup>106</sup>**dwelling** n. a place where a person lives

<sup>107</sup>**stalk** n. a thick or tall stem of a plant

<sup>108</sup>**chimney** n. a part of building through which smoke rises into the outside air

<sup>109</sup>**rag** n. a piece of cloth that is old and no longer in good condition

<sup>110</sup>**shred** n. a long, thin piece cut or torn off of sth

<sup>111</sup>**silvery** adj. shiny and white or light gray in color like silver

<sup>112</sup>**plume** n. a feather or group of feathers on a bird

<sup>113</sup>**uncurl** v. to make (sth that is curled or coiled) straight

Sheridans' chimneys. Washer-women lived in the lane and sweeps and a cobbler<sup>114</sup>, and a man whose house-front was studded<sup>115</sup> all over with minute bird-cages. Children swarmed. When the Sheridans were little they were forbidden to set foot there because of the revolting<sup>116</sup> language and of what they might catch. But since they were grown up, Laura and Laurie on the prowls<sup>117</sup> sometimes walked through. It was disgusting<sup>118</sup> and sordid<sup>119</sup>. They came out with a shudder. But still one must go everywhere; one must see everything. So through they went.

"And just think of what the band would sound like to that poor woman," said Laura.

"Oh, Laura!" Jose began to be seriously annoyed<sup>120</sup>. "If you're going to stop a band playing every time some one has an accident, you'll lead a very strenuous<sup>121</sup> life. I'm every bit as sorry about it as you. I

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<sup>114</sup>**cobbler** n. a person who makes or repairs shoes

<sup>115</sup>**stud** v. to decorate or cover (sth) with many small items

<sup>116</sup>**revolting** adj. extremely unpleasant or offensive

<sup>117</sup>**prowl** n. an act of moving through a place while searching for sth

<sup>118</sup>**disgusting** adj. so unpleasant to see, smell, taste, consider, etc., that you feel slightly sick

<sup>119</sup>**sordid** adj. very bad or dishonest

<sup>120</sup>**annoy** v. to cause (someone) to feel slightly angry

<sup>121</sup>**strenuous** adj. requiring or showing great energy and effort  
forrequiring or showing great energy and effortt

feel just as sympathetic<sup>122</sup>.” Her eyes hardened. She looked at her sister just as she used to when they were little and fighting together. “You won’t bring a drunken workman back to life by being sentimental<sup>123</sup>,” she said softly.

“Drunk! Who said he was drunk?” Laura turned furiously<sup>124</sup> on Jose. She said, just as they had used to say on those occasions, “I’m going straight up to tell mother.”

“Do, dear,” cooed<sup>125</sup> Jose.

“Mother, can I come into your room?” Laura turned the big glass doorknob<sup>126</sup>.

“Of course, child. Why, what’s the matter? What’s given you such a colour?” And Mrs. Sheridan turned round from her dressing-table. She was trying on a new hat.

“Mother, a man’s been killed,” began Laura.

“Not in the garden?” interrupted her mother.

“No, no!”

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<sup>122</sup>**sympathetic** adj. feeling or showing concern about someone who is in a bad situation

<sup>123</sup>**sentimental** adj. based on, showing, or resulting from feelings or emotions rather than reason or thought

<sup>124</sup>**furiously** adj. very angry

<sup>125</sup>**coo** v. to talk in a soft, quiet, and loving way

<sup>126</sup>**doorknob** n. a round handle that you turn to open a door

“Oh, what a fright<sup>127</sup> you gave me!” Mrs. Sheridan sighed with relief<sup>128</sup>, and took off the big hat and held it on her knees.

“But listen, mother,” said Laura. Breathless<sup>129</sup>, half-choking<sup>130</sup>, she told the dreadful story. “Of course, we can’t have our party, can we?” she pleaded<sup>131</sup>. “The band and everybody arriving. They’d hear us, mother; they’er nearly neighbours!”

To Laura’s astonishment her mother behaved just like Jose; it was harder to hear because she seemed amused<sup>132</sup>. She refused to take Laura seriously.

“But, my dear child, use your common sense. It’s only by accident we’ve heard of it. If some one had died there normally—and I can’t understand how they keep alive in those poky<sup>133</sup> little holes—we should still be having our party, shouldn’t we?”

Laura had to say “yes” to that, but she felt it was all wrong. She sat down on her mother’s sofa and

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<sup>127</sup>**fright** n. fear caused by sudden danger

<sup>128</sup>**relief** n. feeling that someone has when sth unpleasant stops or does not happen

<sup>129</sup>**breathless** adj. unable to take enough air into your lungs

<sup>130</sup>**choke** v. to become unable to breathe usually because sth gets stuck in your throat or because the air is not good for breathing

<sup>131</sup>**plead** v. to ask for sth in a serious and emotional way

<sup>132</sup>**amuse** v. to make someone laugh or smile

<sup>133</sup>**poky** adj. small and uncomfortable



pinched the cushion<sup>134</sup> frill<sup>135</sup>.

“Mother, isn’t it really terribly heartless of us?” she asked.

“Darling!” Mrs. Sheridan got up and came over to her, carrying the hat. Before Laura could stop her she had popped it on<sup>136</sup>. “My child!” said her mother, “the hat is yours. It’s made for you. It’s much too young for me. I have never seen you look such a picture. Look at yourself!” And she held up her hand-mirror.

“But, mother,” Laura began again. She couldn’t look at herself; she turned aside.

This time Mrs. Sheridan lost patience just as Jose had done.

“You’re being very absurd, Laura,” she said coldly. “People like that don’t expect sacrifices<sup>137</sup> from us. And it’s not very sympathetic to spoil everybody’s enjoyment as you’re doing now.”

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<sup>134</sup>**cushion** n. a soft object or part that is used to make sth (such as a seat) more comfortable or to protect a surface from damage

<sup>135</sup>**frill** n. a strip of cloth that is gathered into folds on one edge and attached to sth (such as clothing or curtains) as a decoration

<sup>136</sup>**pop (sth) on** pr.v. to put on (clothing) quickly

<sup>137</sup>**sacrifice** n. the act of giving up sth that you want to keep especially in order to get or do sth else or to help someone

“I don’t understand,” said Laura, and she walked quickly out of the room into her own bedroom. There, quite by chance, the first thing she saw was this charming<sup>138</sup> girl in the mirror, in her black hat trimmed<sup>139</sup> with gold daisies, and a long black velvet<sup>140</sup> ribbon. Never had she imagined she could look like that. Is mother right? she thought. And now she hoped her mother was right. Am I being extravagant? Perhaps it was extravagant. Just for a moment she had another glimpse<sup>141</sup> of that poor woman and those little children, and the body being carried into the house. But it all seemed blurred, unreal, like a picture in the newspaper. I’ll remember it again after the party’s over, she decided. And somehow that seemed quite the best plan...

Lunch was over by half-past one. By half-past two they were all ready for the fray<sup>142</sup>. The green-coated band had arrived and was established<sup>143</sup> in a corner

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<sup>138</sup>**charming** adj. very pleasing or appealing

<sup>139</sup>**trim** v. to decorate (sth) especially around the edges with ribbons, ornaments, etc.

<sup>140</sup>**velvet** n. a soft type of cloth that has short raised fibers on one side

<sup>141</sup>**glimpse** n. a brief or quick view or look

<sup>142</sup>**fray** n. a fight, struggle, or disagreement that involves many people

<sup>143</sup>**establish** v. to put (someone or sth) in a position, role, etc., that will last for a long time

of the tennis-court.

“My dear!” trilled<sup>144</sup> Kitty Maitland, “aren’t they too like frogs for words? You ought to have arranged them round the pond with the conductor in the middle on a leaf.”

Laurie arrived and hailed<sup>145</sup> them on his way to dress. At the sight of him Laura remembered the accident again. She wanted to tell him. If Laurie agreed with the others, then it was bound to be all right. And she followed him into the hall.

“Laurie!”

“Hallo<sup>146</sup>!” He was half-way upstairs, but when he turned round and saw Laura he suddenly puffed out his cheeks and goggled<sup>147</sup> his eyes at her. “My word, Laura! You do look stunning<sup>148</sup>,” said Laurie. “What an absolutely topping hat!”

Laura said faintly “Is it?” and smiled up at Laurie, and didn’t tell him after all.

Soon after that people began coming in streams.

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<sup>144</sup>**trill** v. to make a series of quick high sounds

<sup>145</sup>**hail** v. to speak of or welcome (someone or sth) with praise or enthusiasm

<sup>146</sup>**hallo** n. aka. hello

<sup>147</sup>**goggle** v. to look at sth or someone with your eyes very open in a way that shows that you are surprised, amazed, etc.

<sup>148</sup>**stunning** adj. very surprising or shocking

The band struck up; the hired waiters ran from the house to the marquee. Wherever you looked there were couples strolling<sup>149</sup>, bending<sup>150</sup> to the flowers, greeting, moving on over the lawn. They were like bright birds that had alighted<sup>151</sup> in the Sheridans' garden for this one afternoon, on their way to where? Ah, what happiness it is to be with people who all are happy, to press hands, press cheeks, smile into eyes.

“Darling Laura, how well you look!”

“What a becoming hat, child!”

“Laura, you look quite Spanish. I’ve never seen you look so striking<sup>152</sup>.”

And Laura, glowing<sup>153</sup>, answered softly. “Have you had tea? Won’t you have an ice? The passion-fruit<sup>154</sup> ices really are rather special.” She ran to her father and begged him. “Daddy darling, can’t the

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<sup>149</sup>**stroll** v. to walk slowly in usually a pleasant and relaxed way

<sup>150</sup>**bend** v. to move your body so that it is not straight

<sup>151</sup>**alight** v. to stop on a surface after flying

<sup>152</sup>**striking** adj. unusual or extreme in a way that attracts attention

<sup>153</sup>**glowing** adj. very enthusiastic

<sup>154</sup>**passion-fruit** n. *passiflora edulis* is a vine species of passion flower that is native to Brazil, Paraguay and northern Argentina, its common names include passion fruit (US), passion-fruit (UK and Commonwealth), and purple granadilla (South Africa)

band have something to drink?”

And the perfect afternoon slowly ripened<sup>155</sup>, slowly faded<sup>156</sup>, slowly its petals<sup>157</sup> closed.

“Never a more delightful<sup>158</sup> garden party...” “The greatest success...” “Quite the most...”

Laura helped her mother with goodbyes. They stood side by side in the porch till it was all over.

“All over, all over, thank heaven,” said Mrs. Sheridan. “Round up the others, Laura. Let’s go and have some fresh coffee. I’m exhausted<sup>159</sup>. Yes, it’s been very successful. But oh, these parties, these parties! Why will you children insist on giving parties!” And they all of them sat down in the deserted marquee.

“Have a sandwich, daddy dear. I wrote the flag.”

“Thanks.” Mr. Sheridan took a bite and the sandwich was gone. He took another. “I suppose you didn’t hear of a beastly<sup>160</sup> accident that happened today?” he said.

“My dear,” said Mrs. Sheridan, holding up her hand, “we did. It nearly ruined the party. Laura

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<sup>155</sup>**ripen** v. to make (sth) ripe

<sup>156</sup>**fade** v. to disappear gradually

<sup>157</sup>**petal** n. one of the soft, colorful parts of a flower

<sup>158</sup>**delightful** adj. very pleasant

<sup>159</sup>**exhaust** v. to use all of someone’s mental or physical energy

<sup>160</sup>**beastly** adj. very unpleasant

insisted we should put it off.”

“Oh, mother!” Laura didn’t want to be teased<sup>161</sup> about it.

“It was a horrible affair all the same,” said Mr. Sheridan. “The chap was married too. Lived just below in the lane, and leaves a wife and half a dozen kiddies<sup>162</sup>, so they say.”

An awkward<sup>163</sup> little silence fell. Mrs. Sheridan fidgeted<sup>164</sup> with her cup. Really, it was very tactless<sup>165</sup> of father ...

Suddenly she looked up. There on the table were all those sandwiches, cakes, puffs, all uneaten, all going to be wasted. She had one of her brilliant ideas.

“I know,” she said. “Let’s make up a basket. Let’s send that poor creature some of this perfectly good food. At any rate, it will be the greatest treat for the children. Don’t you agree? And she’s sure to have neighbours calling in and so on. What a point to have it all ready prepared. Laura!” She jumped up. “Get me the big basket out of the stairs cupboard.”

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<sup>161</sup>**tease** v. to laugh at and criticize (someone) in a way that is either friendly and playful or cruel and unkind

<sup>162</sup>**kiddie** n. a young child

<sup>163</sup>**awkward** adj. not graceful

<sup>164</sup>**fidget** v. to make a lot of small movements because you are nervous, bored, etc.

<sup>165</sup>**tactless** adj. tending to offend or upset people

“But, mother, do you really think it’s a good idea?” said Laura.

Again, how curious<sup>166</sup>, she seemed to be different from them all. To take scraps<sup>167</sup> from their party. Would the poor woman really like that?

“Of course! What’s the matter with you today? An hour or two ago you were insisting on us being sympathetic, and now—”

Oh, well! Laura ran for the basket. It was filled, it was heaped<sup>168</sup> by her mother.

“Take it yourself, darling,” said she. “Run down just as you are. No, wait, take the arum lilies<sup>169</sup> too. People of that class are so impressed by arum lilies.”

“The stems will ruin her lace<sup>170</sup> frock<sup>171</sup>,” said practical Jose.

So they would. Just in time. “Only the basket, then. And, Laura!” – her mother followed her out of

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<sup>166</sup>**curious** adj. having a desire to learn or know more about sth or someone

<sup>167</sup>**scraps** n. a very small amount—usually used in negative statements

<sup>168</sup>**heap** v. to put (sth) in a large pile

<sup>169</sup>**arum lily** n. *Zantedeschia*, is a genus of eight species of herbaceous perennial flowering plants in the family Araceae, native to southern Africa from South Africa north to Malawi

<sup>170</sup>**lace** n. a very thin and light cloth made with patterns of holes

<sup>171</sup>**frock** n. (old-fashioned) a woman’s or girl’s dress

the marquee— “don’t on any account—”

“What, mother?”

No, better not put such ideas into the child’s head!  
“Nothing! Run along.”

It was just growing dusky<sup>172</sup> as Laura shut their garden gates. A big dog ran by like a shadow. The road gleamed white, and down below in the hollow the little cottages were in deep shade. How quiet it seemed after the afternoon. Here she was going down the hill to somewhere where a man lay dead, and she couldn’t realize it. Why couldn’t she? She stopped a minute. And it seemed to her that kisses, voices, tinkling<sup>173</sup> spoons<sup>174</sup>, laughter, the smell of crushed grass were somehow inside her. She had no room for anything else. How strange! She looked up at the pale sky, and all she thought was, “Yes, it was the most successful party.”

Now the broad road was crossed. The lane began, smoky and dark. Women in shawls<sup>175</sup> and men’s tweed<sup>176</sup> caps hurried by. Men hung over the palings;

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<sup>172</sup>**dusky** adj. somewhat dark

<sup>173</sup>**tinkle** v. to make sounds like the sounds of a small bell

<sup>174</sup>**spoon** n. an eating or cooking tool that has a small shallow bowl attached to a handle

<sup>175</sup>**shawl** n. a piece of cloth that is used especially by women as a covering for the head or shoulders

<sup>176</sup>**tweed** n. a rough, woolen cloth that is woven with different



the children played in the doorways. A low hum<sup>177</sup> came from the mean little cottages. In some of them there was a flicker<sup>178</sup> of light, and a shadow, crab<sup>179</sup>-like, moved across the window. Laura bent her head and hurried on. She wished now she had put on a coat. How her frock shone! And the big hat with the velvet streamer—if only it was another hat! Were the people looking at her? They must be. It was a mistake to have come; she knew all along it was a mistake. Should she go back even now?

No, too late, This was the house. It must be. A dark knot<sup>180</sup> of people stood outside. Beside the gate an old, old woman with a crutch<sup>181</sup> sat in a chair, watching. She had her feet on a newspaper. The voices stopped as Laura drew near. The group parted. It was as though she was expected, as though they had known she was coming here.

Laura was terribly nervous. Tossing<sup>182</sup> the velvet

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colored threads

<sup>177</sup>**hum** n. to make a low continuous sound

<sup>178</sup>**flicker** n. a quick and unsteady movement of light

<sup>179</sup>**crab** n. a sea animal that has a hard shell, eight legs, and two large claws

<sup>180</sup>**knot** n. a group of people who are standing or sitting close together

<sup>181</sup>**crutch** n. a long stick with a padded piece at the top that fits under a person's arm

<sup>182</sup>**toss** v. to throw (sth) with a quick, light motion

ribbon over her shoulder, she said to a woman standing by, “Is this Mrs. Scott’s house?” and the woman, smiling queerly, said, “It is, my lass<sup>183</sup>.”

Oh, to be away from this! She actually said, “Help me, God,” as she walked up the tiny path and knocked. To be away from those staring eyes, or to be covered up in anything, one of those women’s shawls even. I’ll just leave the basket and go, she decided. I shan’t even wait for it to be emptied.

Then the door opened. A little woman in black showed in the gloom<sup>184</sup>.

Laura said, “Are you Mrs. Scott?” But to her horror the woman answered, “Walk in please, miss,” and she was shut in the passage.

“No,” said Laura, “I don’t want to come in. I only want to leave this basket. Mother sent—”

The little woman in the gloomy passage seemed not to have heard her. “Step this way, please, miss,” she said in an oily<sup>185</sup> voice, and Laura followed her.

She found herself in a wretched<sup>186</sup> little low kitchen, lighted by a smoky lamp. There was a woman sitting before the fire.

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<sup>183</sup>**lass** n. a girl or young woman

<sup>184</sup>**gloom** n. partial or total darkness

<sup>185</sup>**oily** adj. covered or soaked with oil

<sup>186</sup>**wretched** adj. very unhappy, ill, etc.

“Em,” said the little creature who had led her in, “Em! It’s young lady.” She turned to Laura. She said meaningly, “I’m ’er sister, miss. You’ll excuse ’er, won’t you?”

“Oh, but of course!” said Laura. “Please, please don’t disturb her. I—I only want to leave—”

But at that moment the woman at the fire turned round. Her face, puffed up, red, with swollen<sup>187</sup> eyes and swollen lips, looked terrible. She seemed as though she couldn’t understand why Laura was there. What did it mean? Why was this stranger standing in the kitchen with a basket? What was it all about? And the poor face puckered<sup>188</sup> up again.

“All right, my dear,” said the other. “I’ll thank the young lady.”

And again she began. “You’ll excuse her, miss, I’m sure,” and her face, swollen too, tried an oily smile.

Laura only wanted to get out, to get away. She was back in the passage. The door opened. She walked straight through into the bedroom, where the dead man was lying.

“You’d like a look at ’im, wouldn’t you?” said

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<sup>187</sup>**swell** v. (adj. **swollen**) to become larger than normal

<sup>188</sup>**pucker** v. to pull the sides of (sth. like skin or cloth) together so that folds or wrinkles are formed

Em's sister, and she brushed past Laura over to the bed. "Don't be afraid, my lass, –" and now her voice sounded fond<sup>189</sup> and sly<sup>190</sup>, and fondly she drew down the sheet—"e lookes a picture. There's nothing to show. Come along, my dear."

Laura came.

There lay a young man, fast asleep—sleeping so soundly, so deeply, that he was far, far away from them both. Oh, so remote, so peaceful. He was dreaming. Never wake him up again. His head was sunk in the pillow, his eyes were closed; they were blind under the closed eyelids<sup>191</sup>. He was given up to his dream. What did garden-parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things. He was wonderful, beautiful. While they were laughing and while the band was playing, this marvel<sup>192</sup> had come to the lane. Happy... happy... . All is well, said that sleeping face. This is just as it should be. I am content<sup>193</sup>.

But all the same you had to cry, and she couldn't

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<sup>189</sup>**fond** adj. feeling or showing love or friendship

<sup>190</sup>**sly** adj. clever in a dishonest way

<sup>191</sup>**eyelid** n. either one of the two movable pieces of skin that cover your eye when it is closed

<sup>192</sup>**marvel** n. someone or sth that is extremely good, skillful, etc.

<sup>193</sup>**content** adj. pleased and satisfied

go out of the room without saying something to him.  
Laura gave a loud childish sob.

“Forgive my hat,” she said.