

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 veiled¹ with a haze² of light gold, as it is sometimes in early summer. The gardener had been up since dawn, mowing³ the lawns⁴ and sweeping them, until the grass and the dark flat rosettes⁵ where the daisy⁶ 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 bowed⁷ down as though they had been visited by archangels.

Breakfast was not yet over before men came to

¹**veil** v. to cover sth with sth that hides it partly or completely

²**haze** n. air containing sth that makes it difficult to see through it

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

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

⁵**rosette** n. a thing that has the shape of a rose

⁶**daisy** n. a small wild flower with white petals around a yellow centre

⁷**bow** v. to bend or make sth bend

put up the marquee⁸.

“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 turban⁹, with a dark wet curl stamped on each cheek¹⁰. Jose, the butterfly, always came down in a silk petticoat¹¹ and a kimono¹² 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-sleeves¹³ stood grouped

⁸**marquee** n. a large tent used at social events

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

¹⁰**cheek** n. either side of the face below the eyes

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

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

¹³**sleeve** n. a part of a piece of clothing that covers all or

together on the garden path. They carried staves¹⁴ covered with rolls of canvas¹⁵, 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 blushed¹⁶ and tried to look severe¹⁷ 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 stammered¹⁸ 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 lanky¹⁹ freckled²⁰ fellow, and he shifted his tool-bag,

part of your arm

¹⁴**stave** n. a set of five lines on which music is written

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

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

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

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

¹⁹**lanky** adj. having long thin limbs and moving in an awkward way

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

knocked back his straw²¹ 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 chap²² thrust²³ out his under-lip, and the tall fellow frowned²⁴.

“I don’t fancy²⁵ it,” said he. “Not conspicuous²⁶ enough. You see, with a thing like a marquee,” and he turned to Laura in his easy way, “you want to put

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

²²**chap** n. used to talk about a man in a friendly way

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

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

²⁵**fancy** v. to want sth or want to do sth

²⁶**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 upbringing²⁷ 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 pale²⁸. He had a haggard²⁹ 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 karakas³⁰. Then the karaka-trees would

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

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

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

³⁰**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, gleaming³¹ leaves, and their clusters of yellow fruit. They were like trees you imagined growing on a desert island, proud, solitary³², lifting their leaves and fruits to the sun in a kind of silent splendour³³. Must they be hidden by a marquee?

They must. Already the men had shouldered their staves and were making for the place, pinched³⁴ a sprig³⁵ of lavender, put his thumb and forefinger to his nose and snuffed³⁶ 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

³¹**gleam** v. to shine with a pale clear light

³²**solitary** adj. alone, with no other people or things around

³³**splendour** n. grand and impressive beauty

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

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

³⁶**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 absurd³⁷ class distinctions³⁸. 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, matey³⁹?" "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 despised⁴⁰ stupid conventions⁴¹, 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 skimmed⁴², over the lawn,

³⁷**absurd** adj. completely ridiculous; not logical and sensible

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

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

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

⁴¹**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.

⁴²**skim** v. to move quickly and lightly over a surface, not

up the path, up the steps, across the veranda⁴³, and into the porch⁴⁴. 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 squiz⁴⁵ 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?” gasped⁴⁶ Laura.

“Rather,” said Laurie’s warm, boyish voice, and he squeezed his sister too, and gave her a gentle push. “Dash⁴⁷ off to the telephone, old girl.”

The telephone. “Yes, yes; oh yes. Kitty? Good morning, dear. Come to lunch? Do, dear. Delighted⁴⁸ of course. It will only be a very scratch⁴⁹ meal—just

touching it or only touching it occasionally

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

⁴⁴**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

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

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

⁴⁷**dash** v. to go somewhere very quickly

⁴⁸**delighted** adj. very pleased

⁴⁹**scratch** adj. put together in a hurry using whatever people

the sandwich crusts⁵⁰ and broken meringue⁵¹-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, flung⁵² 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 baize⁵³ door that led to the kitchen regions

or materials are available

⁵⁰**crust** n. the harder outer surface of bread

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

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

⁵³**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 muffled⁵⁴ thud⁵⁵. And now there came a long, chuckling⁵⁶ 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 chase⁵⁷, 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 pealed⁵⁸, and there sounded the rustle⁵⁹ of Sadie's print skirt on the stairs. A man's voice murmured⁶⁰; 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.

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

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

⁵⁶**chuckle** v. to laugh quietly

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

⁵⁸**peal** v. to ring loudly

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

⁶⁰**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, shallow⁶¹ tray full of pots of pink lilies. No other kind. Nothing but lilies—canna⁶² lilies, big pink flowers, wide open, radiant⁶³, almost frighteningly⁶⁴ alive on bright crimson⁶⁵ stems.

“O-oh, Sadie!” said Laura, and the sound was like a little moan⁶⁶. She crouched⁶⁷ down as if to warm herself at that blaze⁶⁸ 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.

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

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

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

⁶⁴**frightening** adj. making you feel afraid

⁶⁵**crimson** adj. dark red in color

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

⁶⁷**crouch** v. to lower your body to the ground by bending your legs

⁶⁸**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 interfere⁶⁹,” said Laura. Sadie has gone. The florist’s man was still outside at his van⁷⁰. 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 chesterfield⁷¹ against the wall and move everything out of the room except the

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

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

⁷¹**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 carpet⁷² 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 passionately⁷³ that Jose's face changed. She clasped⁷⁴ her hands. She looked mournfully⁷⁵ and enigmatically⁷⁶ at her mother and Laura as they came in.

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

⁷²**carpet** n. a heavy fabric cover for a floor

⁷³**passionate** adj. having, showing, or expressing strong emotions or beliefs

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

⁷⁵**mournful** adj. full of sorrow

⁷⁶**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 desperate⁷⁷ than ever, her face broke into a brilliant⁷⁸, dreadfully⁷⁹ unsympathetic⁸⁰ 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

⁷⁷**desperate** adj. feeling or showing despair

⁷⁸**brilliant** adj. very bright; very impressive or successful

⁷⁹**dreadful** adj. very bad or unpleasant

⁸⁰**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, pacify⁸¹ 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?"

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

“Olive⁸², 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 terrifying⁸³.

“I have never seen such exquisite⁸⁴ sandwiches,” said Jose’s rapturous⁸⁵ 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 pantry⁸⁶. She had seen the man pass the window.

That meant the cream puffs⁸⁷ had come. Godber’s were famous for their cream puffs. Nobody ever

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

⁸³**terrify** v. to cause (sb) to be extremely afraid

⁸⁴**exquisite** adj. finely done or made

⁸⁵**rapturous** adj. showing extreme pleasure, love, or enthusiasm for someone or sth

⁸⁶**pantry** n. a small room in a house in which food is stored

⁸⁷**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 feathery⁸⁸, 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 shudder⁸⁹. All the same, two minutes later Jose and Laura were licking⁹⁰ their fingers with that absorbed⁹¹ inward look that only comes from whipped⁹² cream.

⁸⁸**feathery** adj. extremely light and soft or delicate

⁸⁹**shudder** v. to shake because of fear, cold, etc.

⁹⁰**lick** v. to pass the tongue over

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

⁹²**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,” clucked⁹³ cook like an agitated⁹⁴ 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 snatched⁹⁵ 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 carter⁹⁶. His horse shied at a traction⁹⁷-engine, corner of Hawke

⁹³**cluck** v. to make a low sound with the tongue

⁹⁴**agitate** v. to disturb, excite, or anger (someone)

⁹⁵**snatch** v. to take (sth) quickly or eagerly

⁹⁶**carter** n. a person who hauls goods in a cart

⁹⁷**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 relish⁹⁸. “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 leaned⁹⁹ against it. “Jose!” she said, horrified¹⁰⁰, “however are we going to stop everything?”

“Stop everything, Laura!” cried Jose in astonishment¹⁰¹. “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 extravagant¹⁰².”

against the surface it is moving along

⁹⁸**relish** n. enjoyment of or delight in sth

⁹⁹**lean** v. to bend or move from a straight position

¹⁰⁰**horrify** v. to cause (someone) to feel horror or shock

¹⁰¹**astonishment** n. a feeling of being very surprised

¹⁰²**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 lane¹⁰³ to themselves at the very bottom of a steep¹⁰⁴ rise that led up to the house. A broad road ran between. True, they were far too near. They were the greatest possible eyesore¹⁰⁵, and they had no right to be in the neighbourhood at all. They were little mean dwellings¹⁰⁶ painted a chocolate brown. In the garden patches there was nothing but cabbage stalks¹⁰⁷, sick hens and tomato cans. The very smoke coming out of their chimneys¹⁰⁸ was poverty-stricken. Little rags¹⁰⁹ and shreds¹¹⁰ of smoke, so unlike the great silvery¹¹¹ plumes¹¹² that uncurled¹¹³ from the

¹⁰³**lane** n. a narrow road or path

¹⁰⁴**steep** adj. almost straight up and down

¹⁰⁵**eyesore** n. an ugly object or building

¹⁰⁶**dwelling** n. a place where a person lives

¹⁰⁷**stalk** n. a thick or tall stem of a plant

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

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

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

¹¹¹**silvery** adj. shiny and white or light gray in color like silver

¹¹²**plume** n. a feather or group of feathers on a bird

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

Sheridans' chimneys. Washer-women lived in the lane and sweeps and a cobbler¹¹⁴, and a man whose house-front was studded¹¹⁵ all over with minute bird-cages. Children swarmed. When the Sheridans were little they were forbidden to set foot there because of the revolting¹¹⁶ language and of what they might catch. But since they were grown up, Laura and Laurie on the prowls¹¹⁷ sometimes walked through. It was disgusting¹¹⁸ and sordid¹¹⁹. 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 annoyed¹²⁰. "If you're going to stop a band playing every time some one has an accident, you'll lead a very strenuous¹²¹ life. I'm every bit as sorry about it as you. I

¹¹⁴**cobbler** n. a person who makes or repairs shoes

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

¹¹⁶**revolting** adj. extremely unpleasant or offensive

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

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

¹¹⁹**sordid** adj. very bad or dishonest

¹²⁰**annoy** v. to cause (someone) to feel slightly angry

¹²¹**strenuous** adj. requiring or showing great energy and effort
forrequiring or showing great energy and effortt

feel just as sympathetic¹²².” 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 sentimental¹²³,” she said softly.

“Drunk! Who said he was drunk?” Laura turned furiously¹²⁴ on Jose. She said, just as they had used to say on those occasions, “I’m going straight up to tell mother.”

“Do, dear,” cooed¹²⁵ Jose.

“Mother, can I come into your room?” Laura turned the big glass doorknob¹²⁶.

“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!”

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

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

¹²⁴**furious** adj. very angry

¹²⁵**coo** v. to talk in a soft, quiet, and loving way

¹²⁶**doorknob** n. a round handle that you turn to open a door

“Oh, what a fright¹²⁷ you gave me!” Mrs. Sheridan sighed with relief¹²⁸, and took off the big hat and held it on her knees.

“But listen, mother,” said Laura. Breathless¹²⁹, half-choking¹³⁰, she told the dreadful story. “Of course, we can’t have our party, can we?” she pleaded¹³¹. “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 amused¹³². 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 poky¹³³ 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

¹²⁷**fright** n. fear caused by sudden danger

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

¹²⁹**breathless** adj. unable to take enough air into your lungs

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

¹³¹**plead** v. to ask for sth in a serious and emotional way

¹³²**amuse** v. to make someone laugh or smile

¹³³**poky** adj. small and uncomfortable

pinched the cushion¹³⁴ frill¹³⁵.

“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 on¹³⁶. “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 sacrifices¹³⁷ from us. And it’s not very sympathetic to spoil everybody’s enjoyment as you’re doing now.”

¹³⁴**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

¹³⁵**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

¹³⁶**pop (sth) on** pr.v. to put on (clothing) quickly

¹³⁷**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 charming¹³⁸ girl in the mirror, in her black hat trimmed¹³⁹ with gold daisies, and a long black velvet¹⁴⁰ 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 glimpse¹⁴¹ 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 fray¹⁴². The green-coated band had arrived and was established¹⁴³ in a corner

¹³⁸**charming** adj. very pleasing or appealing

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

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

¹⁴¹**glimpse** n. a brief or quick view or look

¹⁴²**fray** n. a fight, struggle, or disagreement that involves many people

¹⁴³**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!” trilled¹⁴⁴ 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 hailed¹⁴⁵ 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!”

“Hallo¹⁴⁶!” He was half-way upstairs, but when he turned round and saw Laura he suddenly puffed out his cheeks and goggled¹⁴⁷ his eyes at her. “My word, Laura! You do look stunning¹⁴⁸,” 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.

¹⁴⁴**trill** v. to make a series of quick high sounds

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

¹⁴⁶**hallo** n. aka. hello

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

¹⁴⁸**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 strolling¹⁴⁹, bending¹⁵⁰ to the flowers, greeting, moving on over the lawn. They were like bright birds that had alighted¹⁵¹ 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 striking¹⁵².”

And Laura, glowing¹⁵³, answered softly. “Have you had tea? Won’t you have an ice? The passion-fruit¹⁵⁴ ices really are rather special.” She ran to her father and begged him. “Daddy darling, can’t the

¹⁴⁹**stroll** v. to walk slowly in usually a pleasant and relaxed way

¹⁵⁰**bend** v. to move your body so that it is not straight

¹⁵¹**alight** v. to stop on a surface after flying

¹⁵²**striking** adj. unusual or extreme in a way that attracts attention

¹⁵³**glowing** adj. very enthusiastic

¹⁵⁴**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 ripened¹⁵⁵, slowly faded¹⁵⁶, slowly its petals¹⁵⁷ closed.

“Never a more delightful¹⁵⁸ 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 exhausted¹⁵⁹. 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 beastly¹⁶⁰ accident that happened today?” he said.

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

¹⁵⁵**ripen** v. to make (sth) ripe

¹⁵⁶**fade** v. to disappear gradually

¹⁵⁷**petal** n. one of the soft, colorful parts of a flower

¹⁵⁸**delightful** adj. very pleasant

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

¹⁶⁰**beastly** adj. very unpleasant

insisted we should put it off.”

“Oh, mother!” Laura didn’t want to be teased¹⁶¹ 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 kiddies¹⁶², so they say.”

An awkward¹⁶³ little silence fell. Mrs. Sheridan fidgeted¹⁶⁴ with her cup. Really, it was very tactless¹⁶⁵ 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.”

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

¹⁶²**kiddie** n. a young child

¹⁶³**awkward** adj. not graceful

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

¹⁶⁵**tactless** adj. tending to offend or upset people

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

Again, how curious¹⁶⁶, she seemed to be different from them all. To take scraps¹⁶⁷ 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 heaped¹⁶⁸ by her mother.

“Take it yourself, darling,” said she. “Run down just as you are. No, wait, take the arum lilies¹⁶⁹ too. People of that class are so impressed by arum lilies.”

“The stems will ruin her lace¹⁷⁰ frock¹⁷¹,” said practical Jose.

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

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

¹⁶⁷**scraps** n. a very small amount—usually used in negative statements

¹⁶⁸**heap** v. to put (sth) in a large pile

¹⁶⁹**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

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

¹⁷¹**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 dusky¹⁷² 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, tinkling¹⁷³ spoons¹⁷⁴, 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 shawls¹⁷⁵ and men’s tweed¹⁷⁶ caps hurried by. Men hung over the palings;

¹⁷²**dusky** adj. somewhat dark

¹⁷³**tinkle** v. to make sounds like the sounds of a small bell

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

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

¹⁷⁶**tweed** n. a rough, woolen cloth that is woven with different

the children played in the doorways. A low hum¹⁷⁷ came from the mean little cottages. In some of them there was a flicker¹⁷⁸ of light, and a shadow, crab¹⁷⁹-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 knot¹⁸⁰ of people stood outside. Beside the gate an old, old woman with a crutch¹⁸¹ 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. Tossing¹⁸² the velvet

colored threads

¹⁷⁷**hum** n. to make a low continuous sound

¹⁷⁸**flicker** n. a quick and unsteady movement of light

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

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

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

¹⁸²**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 lass¹⁸³.”

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 gloom¹⁸⁴.

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 oily¹⁸⁵ voice, and Laura followed her.

She found herself in a wretched¹⁸⁶ little low kitchen, lighted by a smoky lamp. There was a woman sitting before the fire.

¹⁸³**lass** n. a girl or young woman

¹⁸⁴**gloom** n. partial or total darkness

¹⁸⁵**oily** adj. covered or soaked with oil

¹⁸⁶**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 swollen¹⁸⁷ 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 puckered¹⁸⁸ 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

¹⁸⁷**swell** v. (adj. **swollen**) to become larger than normal

¹⁸⁸**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 fond¹⁸⁹ and sly¹⁹⁰, and fondly she drew down the sheet—"e looks 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 eyelids¹⁹¹. 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 marvel¹⁹² had come to the lane. Happy... happy... . All is well, said that sleeping face. This is just as it should be. I am content¹⁹³.

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

¹⁸⁹**fond** adj. feeling or showing love or friendship

¹⁹⁰**sly** adj. clever in a dishonest way

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

¹⁹²**marvel** n. someone or sth that is extremely good, skillful, etc.

¹⁹³**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.

And this time she didn’t wait for Em’s sister. She found her way out of the door, down the path, past all those dark people. At the corner of the lane she met Laurie.

He stepped out of the shadow. “Is that you, Laura?”

“Yes.”

“Mother was getting anxious¹⁹⁴. Was it all right?”

“Yes, quite. Oh, Laurie!” She took his arm, she pressed up against him.

“I say, you’re not crying, are you?” asked her brother.

Laura shook her head. She was.

Laurie put his arm round her shoulder. “Don’t cry.” he said in his warm, loving voice. “Was it awful?”

“No.” sobbed Laura. “It was simply marvellous. But, Laurie—” She stopped, she looked at her brother. “Isn’t life,” she stammered, “isn’t life—” But what life was she couldn’t explain. No matter. He quite understood.

“*Isn’t* it, darling?” said Laurie.

¹⁹⁴**anxious** adj. afraid or nervous especially about what may happen