

KATHERINE MANSFIELD

SELECTED STORIES

in Katherine Mansfield: Selected Stories, Oxford World Classics.

KATHERINE MANSFIELD was born Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp in New Zealand in 1888. The daughter of a prominent Wellington businessman, she left for London in 1908 to embark on a literary career. The following year she married and separated in the space of a day. A period of unhappiness and disillusion in Germany resulted in a series of bitter sketches of German life. In 1911 she met John Middleton Murry whom she was later to marry.

The death of her brother in the War turned her thoughts to her New Zealand childhood, the result being a series of stories which contain her finest work. She developed tuberculosis in 1917 and died suddenly in January 1923 at Fontainebleau.

Vocabulary:

- prominent: very important
- to embark on: to start
- disillusion: when things turn out differently from what one expected
- tuberculosis: a disease
- to veil: to cover
- a marquee: a tent that is set up at garden parties, in which people can eat and dance in case of rain.

Questions:

1. What was the weather like that day?
2. What time of the year was it?
3. What had the gardener been doing since dawn?
4. Was this the first time they were having a party?
5. Why couldn't Meg go and supervise the men?
6. Who was sent to supervise them?

The garden-party

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 with a haze of light gold, as it is sometimes in early summer. The gardener had been up since dawn, mowing the lawns and sweeping them, until the grass and the dark flat rosettes where the daisy 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 down as though they had been visited by archangels.

Breakfast was not yet over before the men came to put up the marquee.

'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. I 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, with a dark wet curl stamped on each cheek. Jose, the butterfly, always came down in a silk petticoat and kimono 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 having to arrange things; she always felt she could do it so much better than anybody else.