

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katherine Mansfield Beaumont was born on October 14th 1888 in Wellington, New Zealand. She was the daughter of a middle-class colonial family. She began writing when she was at school and her stories were published in two school magazines. In 1903, she moved to London to attend Queen's College, then in 1906 she returned to New Zealand. However, she found life very dull after her time in London, and she persuaded her father to let her return there with an allowance of £100 a year.

She led a Bohemian lifestyle until she moved to Germany in 1909. In Germany she started writing in earnest and in 1911, her first collection of stories *In a German Pension* was




ABOUT THE BOOK

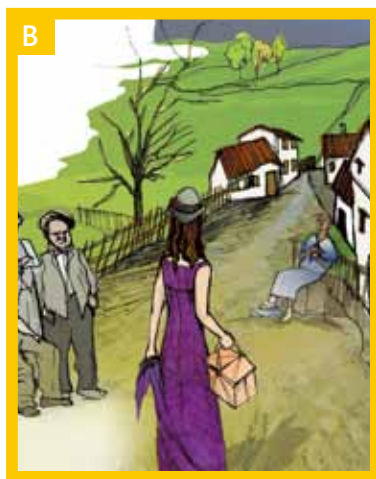
The Garden Party was written in the period after Mansfield's brother's death in 1915 when the author wrote a number of stories set in her native New Zealand at the turn of the century. The scene of the story – the Sheridan's large house and garden – is clearly based on her family's opulent home at 75 Tinakori Road in Wellington, where she lived from 1898 to 1903. The event – a middle-class garden party – is also based on the kind of social occasions she would have taken part in as a girl and young woman.

As the Sheridans prepare for the garden party, Laura, their teenage daughter learns that a neighboring workman has died. The news disturbs her and she feels the party should be canceled as a sign of respect. The story is one of great contrasts – the brightness, wealth and life at the party, and the darkness, poverty and death at the worker's house.

BEFORE READING

- 1 Think of your house. Imagine you are walking through it, describe the rooms and the feeling you get from each individual room.

-  2 Look at these scenes from the story. Discuss with a partner.



- a Describe the scenes.
- b What is the atmosphere like in each one?
- c Who do you think lives there?

- 3 Now write a short description of each one. Imagine you live there. Describe your home.



The weather was ideal. There could not have been a more perfect day for a garden party. Windless¹, warm, the sky without a cloud. And the blue was thinly covered with a haze² of light gold, as it is sometimes in early summer. The gardener had been up since dawn, cutting the lawns³ and sweeping⁴ them, until the grass 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, literally⁵ hundreds, had come out in a single night; the green bushes bowed down⁶ as though they had been visited by angels.

Breakfast was not over before the men came to put up the big tent.

"Where do you want the marquee⁷ 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 honored guest. "

But Meg could not possibly go and supervise the men. She had washed her hair before breakfast, and sat drinking her coffee with a green towel round her head, and a dark wet curl stuck onto each cheek. Jose, the butterfly, came down in a silk petticoat⁸ and a kimono jacket.

Think

- Try to imagine the garden.
- Think of a place outdoors that you like. Describe it.



- 1 **windless**: without any wind
2 **haze**: light fog when it is hot
3 **lawns**: areas of short grass
4 **sweeping**: brushing
5 **literally**: really; exactly that

- 6 **bowed down**: bent over
7 **marquee**: big tent used for parties, etc.
8 **petticoat**: light skirt women wear under a skirt or dress