



Night-Scented Stock (1917)

By Katherine Mansfield

White, white in the milky night
The moon danced over a tree.
"Wouldn't it be lovely to swim in the lake!"
Someone whispered to me.

"Oh, do-do-do!" cooed someone else,
And clasped her hands to her chin.
"I should so love to see the white bodies--
All the white bodies jump in!"

The big dark house hid secretly
Behind the magnolia and the spreading pear-tree;
But there was a sound of music--music rippled and ran
Like a lady laughing behind her fan,
Laughing and mocking and running away...
"Come into the garden--it's as light as day!"

"I can't dance to that Hungarian stuff,
The rhythm in it is not passionate enough,"
Said somebody. "I absolutely refuse...."
But he took off his socks and his shoes
And round he spun. "It's like Hungarian fruit dishes
Hard and bright--a mechanical blue!"
His white feet flicked in the grass like fishes...
Someone cried: "I want to dance, too!"

But one with a queer Russian ballet head
Curled up on a blue wooden bench instead.
And another, shadowy--shadowy and tall--
Walked in the shadow of the dark house wall,
Someone beside her. It shone in the gloom,
His round grey hat, like a wet mushroom.

"Don't you think perhaps..." piped someone's flute.
"How sweet the flowers smell!" I heard the other say.
Somebody picked a wet, wet pink,
Smelled it and threw it away.



"Is the moon a virgin or is she a harlot?"
Asked somebody. Nobody would tell.
The faces and the hands moved in a pattern
As the music rose and fell,

In a dancing, mysterious, moon-bright pattern
Like flowers nodding under the sea...
The music stopped and there was nothing left of them
But the moon dancing over the tree.

