

The Garden Party

A dramatisation of Katherine Mansfield's story by Kevin Boon

The Garden Party

By Katherine Mansfield

Characters

	Scene 1	Scene 2	Scene 3	Scene 4
<i>Narrator</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>Kezia</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>Isabel</i>	+	+	+	<i>Shadowy Figure</i>
<i>Mrs B.</i>	+	+	+	<i>Em the Widow</i>
<i>Workman 1</i>	+	<i>Godbers Man</i>	<i>Guest 2</i>	<i>Dead Man</i>
<i>Workman 2</i>	+	<i>Voice</i>	<i>Mr B.</i>	<i>Shadowy Figure</i>
<i>Leslie</i>	+	-	<i>Waiter</i>	+
<i>Sadie</i>	--	+	<i>Guest 1</i>	<i>Em's Sister</i>

Settings

Scene I: *The Lawn at the Burnell's Residence.* A bare stage with green lighting on the floor, representing lawn and blue lighting on the back representing sky. Some shrubs or other greenery if desired.

Scene 2: *The Hall or Lobby of the Burnell's Residence.* Lighting change to brown on floor yellow at back. Dresser, with clock and telephone on one side, two-seater at back.

Scene 3: *The Lawn at the Burnell's Residence,* with the addition of an outside table, chairs parasol and any other decorations desired.

Scene 4: *The darkened street, lane and the interior of the cottage.* A chair and a truckle bed, are used in the cottage scene. Spotlights are employed to pick out individuals.

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Scene 1 The lawn at the Burnell's residence in Thorndon. The house is out of sight at stage right. Only a bare stage is required but the lighting is bright, with green on the stage floor and blue on the back curtain. Some shrubs and other garden plants may be provided if desired.

Narrator: (Comes on stage carrying her script) 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 sometimes is in every 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 that they understood that roses are the only flowers that impress people at garden-parties; the only flowers that everyone is certain of knowing. Hundreds, yes, literally hundreds had come out in a single night: The green bushes bowed as though they had been visited by archangels. Breakfast was not yet over before the men came to put up the Marquee: **(Exit)**

Two workmen enter at stage left, carrying poles and tools. One knocks at a 'door' at stage right and steps back.

Isabel: (Enters wearing a dressing gown and with her hair wrapped in a towel. She glances at the men in horror and calls up to her mother.) Mother! Mother! The workmen have arrived to put up the Marquee. Where do you want it put?

Mrs B: (Calling from off stage) My dear child it's no use asking me. I'm determined to leave everything to you children this year. Forget I'm your mother. Treat me as an honoured guest..

Isabel: But mother, I cannot possibly supervise the men. I've just washed my hair – and I haven't finished my coffee!

Mrs B: Well ask Kezia to do it; she's the artistic one.

Isabel: (Gives a sigh and Exits)

Kezia: (Bustles on stage wearing a sun dress and munching on a piece of toast. Putting the toast behind her back she nervously approaches the workmen. Then, with a show of false confidence) Good Morning. Have you come to put up the marquee?

Man 1: That's right, Miss. Where would you like us to put it?

Kezia: (Pointing) Well, what about on the lily-lawn there? Would that do?

Man 1: (After a pause) Hmm, I don't fancy it. Not conspicuous enough... You see, with a thing like a marquee you want to put it somewhere where it hits you bang, slap in the eye... if you follow me?

Kezia: (A little disconcerted) Well, In a corner of the tennis court then - but the band's going to be there...

Man 2: (Enthusiastically) You're going to have a band?

Kezia: Well, only a very small one.

Man 1: (Pointing in a different direction) Look here, Miss, that's the place.
Against those trees over there. That'll do fine.

Kezia: Oh, all right then. I was just going to suggest there.

As the workmen exit, Kezia watches them depart and muses to herself...

How extraordinarily nice workmen are. Why can't I have workmen friends, rather than the silly boys I danced with at the Sunday night supper? I could get on much better with men like them. It's all the fault of these absurd class distinctions. Well, for my part I don't feel them. Not one atom... **(Her musings are interrupted)**

Leslie: (Calling from the other side of stage) Kezia, Kezia, where are you? Telephone, Kezia!

Kezia: (Skimming over to him) Com-ing!

Leslie: (Surreptitiously handing her a jacket). I say, Kezia, you wouldn't mind having a squiz at my coat before this afternoon: See if it wants pressing?

Kezia: Oh, just for you. **(Gives him an affectionate hug)** I do love parties, don't you Bogie.

Leslie: Ra-ther. Now dash off to the telephone, old girl! **(Kezia and Leslie Exit).**

Lights or curtain. End of Scene 1

Scene 2 The Lobby of the Burnell's residence. There is a dresser on one side of stage, with a phone and a clock on it, and possibly a two-seater at the back.

Kezia: (Enters and picks up an old fashioned telephone) Hu - low, yes, Kitty! Isn't it a perfect morning? Come for lunch. It will only be scraps – spare sandwiches and cakes. That's wonderful. (Her Mother's voice is heard calling to her) One moment – hold the line. Mothers calling something. (Calling Back) What, mother? Can't hear.

Mrs B: (Louder voice off) Tell her to wear that sweet little hat she had on last Sunday.

Kezia: Mother says you're to wear that sweet little hat you had on last Sunday. Good, one o'clock then. Bye - bye. (She hangs up and begins a stretching exercise).

The Doorbell peals and Sadie the Maid, wearing a print skirt, bustles across the stage to answer it. A Man's voice mumbles and Sadie replies:

Sadie: I'm sure I don't know where they're to go. Waite here and I'll go and ask Miss Burnell.

Kezia: (When Sadie comes back on stage) What is it, Sadie?

Sadie: It's the florist, Miss Burnell. He has several trays of Lilies. He wants to know where to put them.

Kezia: Several trays of lilies? Who could have ordered so many? It must be some mistake.

Mrs B: (Entering suddenly) No it's not a mistake. I ordered them. Won't they be lovely? I was passing the shop yesterday and I saw them in the window. I thought, for once in my life I will have enough Canna lilies. The garden Party will be a good excuse...

Kezia: (Giving her an affectionate hug) But mother, I thought you said you didn't mean to interfere!

Mrs B: My darling child, you wouldn't want a logical mother, would you? Sadie, tell the florist to bank them up on both sides of the porch – don't you agree Kezia?

Kezia: I do indeed, Mother! (Sadie hurries off to do their bidding).

From the room next door the sound a voice is heard singing with great enthusiasm but very limited talent:

Voice: This life is *Wee*-ary,
A tear – a Sigh.
A love that *Chan*-ges,
This life is *Wee*-ary,
A tear – a Sigh.
A love that *Chan*-ges,
And then...Good-bye!

Isabel: (Enters, still resplendent in her dressing-gown and with her hair in a towel) Aren't I in good voice this morning, Mummy (She beams). I'm practicing in case I'm asked to sing this afternoon.

Mrs B. Ah, well darling, umm... (She is saved by Sadie rushing into the room).

Sadie: If you please, Maam. Cook wants to know if you've got the flags ready for the sandwiches?

Mrs B: (Dreamily) The flags for the sandwiches? Aah, let me see... Tell Cook I'll let her have them in ten minutes! **(Sadie hurries off)** Now, Kezia, You'll have to help me write the flags. Isabel, take that wet thing off your head and go and get dressed this instant. **(As she leaves).** And Isabel, try to pacify Cook if you go into the kitchen, will you. I'm terrified of her this morning. **(Exit Isabel).** Kezia, be a pet and bring me the envelope with the labels. I left it on the dresser over there. **(Kezia goes to look)**

Kezia: (Calling back) It's not here, Mother.

Mrs B. (Beginning to panic) Not there! Not there! But it must be there. I distinctly remember putting it there. One of you girls must have moved it...

Kezia: (Coming back with an envelope) It's all right, I've found it. It was behind the clock.

Mrs B: (Taking the envelope and removing a list) Here, I'll call them out to you, and you go over and write them out. **(Kezia takes the envelope to the dresser. Mrs Burnell peers at the list).** Now there's cream-cheese and lemon-curd - have you got that?

Kezia: (After a pause) Yes, mother.

Mrs B: (Peering) And what's this? It looks like Egg and Oil? What a horrible combination!

Kezia: (Coming back on stage and gently taking the list from her). Olive, Mother, Egg and Olive. I'll finish them of for you. You must have so much to do.

Mrs B: (Preparing to Exit) Well, I do rather. How many kinds of sandwiches are we having?

Kezia: Fifteen.

Mrs B: Fifteen! Goodness Gracious – and you'll give the flags to Cook, wont you?

Kezia: Yes, Mother.

Mrs B: (As she makes off) You are a pet.

Kezia remains in the room studying the list.

Sadie: (Looking rather shaken) The Godbers Man has arrived, Miss.

Kezia: Oh! Wonderful! No one in the world makes cream puffs like Godbers.

Sadie: But he's brought some terrible news, Miss. - A man has been killed!

Kezia: A man, Killed! Where? How? When?

Godber: (Wearing white overalls, noses into the room) Yes, it's true Miss I'm afraid.

Kezia: Where did it happen?

Godber: You know those little cottages just below here Miss?

Narrator: Know them? Of course she knew them. The little cottages were in a narrow lane at the bottom of a steep rise that led up to the house. A broad road ran between. They were the greatest possible eyesore and they had no right to be in that neighbourhood at all. They were mean little dwellings painted a chocolate brown. In the garden patches there was nothing but cabbage stalks, sick hens and tomato cans.

The very smoke coming from their chimneys was poverty-stricken. Little rags and shreds of smoke, so unlike the great silvery plums that curled from the Burnell's chimneys. Washerwomen lived in the lane and sweeps and a cobbler and a man whose house-front was studded all over with minute bird-cages. Children swarmed.

Kezia: (**Impatiently**) But, how was the man killed?

Godber: (**Unhurried**) Well, there's a young chap living there, name of Scott – a carter. His horse shied at a traction-engine that was going past this morning. He was thrown. Landed on the back of his head...

Kezia: (**Horrified**) And killed?

Godbers: Dead when they picked him up. They were taking his body home when I came up here. (**As he leaves**). They say he left a wife and five little ones. (**Exit**)

Isabel: (**Arrives, attracted by the noise**) What is happening? I thought I saw the Godber's Man arrive.

Kezia: (**Still in shock**) Oh, Isabel. He has brought some terrible news. A man from the lane across the road has been killed! We must stop the Garden Party at once!

Isabel: (**Incredulous**) Stop the Garden Party? My dear Kezia, don't be absurd. Of course we can't do anything of the kind. Nobody expects us to...

Kezia: But we can't possibly have a Garden Party with a man dead just across the road. Think what the band would sound like to the poor woman and her family...

Isabel: Oh, Kezia, I feel every bit as sorry as you do, but you won't bring a drunken workman back to life by stopping the garden party...

Kezia: Drunk! Who said he was drunk? I'm going to tell mother about this.

Isabel: You do, my dear (**Exit**).

Kezia: (**Calling up stairs urgently**) Mother! Mother! Come quickly. Something terrible has happened!

Mrs B: (**Bustles on looking very anxious holding a large sunhat**) Good Heavens, child! What is it? – You haven't spoiled those sandwich labels, have you?

Kezia: No, Mother. But a man has been killed!

Mrs B: (**Appalled**) Not in the garden! I hope...

Kezia: No, no!

Mrs B. (**With a sigh of relief**) Oh, what a fright you gave me!

Kezia: But listen Mother. A man who lives across the road was killed when he was thrown from his cart. We won't be able to have the Garden Party, with the band and everybody arriving, will we Mother? They're nearly neighbours...

Mrs B: (**Rather amused**) My dear child, use your common sense. It's only by accident that we've heard about it. If someone had died there normally we would still be having our party, wouldn't we?

Kezia: (Doubtfully) I suppose so. But won't it be terribly heartless of us?

Mrs B: (Becoming a little annoyed) Now you are becoming ridiculous, Kezia. People like that don't expect sacrifices from us. And it wouldn't be very sympathetic to spoil the Garden Party for everyone else, would it?

Kezia still looks doubtful. But her mother takes the hat she has been carrying and puts it on her head. This hat is yours. It was made for you. It's much too young for me. Now finish those sandwich labels and take them through to Cook, or there really will be a calamity in this house! **(They exit at opposite ends of the stage).**

Curtain or lights.

End of Scene 2

Scene 3 The Burnell's lawn. As for scene one, but with addition of an outdoor table with a parasol covering and 4 chairs. All available cast are milling about cheerfully, with the sound of the band in the background and a waiter zipping across the stage with a tray of drinks.

Narrator: The people came in streams. The band struck up; the hired waiters ran from the house to the marquee. Wherever you looked there were couples strolling, bending to the flowers, greeting, moving on over the lawn. They were like bright birds that had alighted on the Burnell's garden for this one afternoon, on their way to – where? Ah, what happiness it is to be with people who are all happy, to press hands, press cheeks, to smile into their eyes. **(Exit)**

Kezia: Enters, wearing her sun dress and a Panama hat, greets two of the Guests.

Guest 1: Darling Kezia, how well you look!

Guest 2: What a becoming hat, child!

Guest 1: You look quite Spanish Kezia. I've never seen you look so striking!

Kezia: (Glowing) Have you had some tea? Won't you try an ice? The passion fruit ices are really rather special. **(She sees her father and calls to him):** Daddy darling, can't the band have something to drink? **(She exits with her friends).**

Narrator: The perfect afternoon slowly ripened, slowly faded, slowly its petals closed. **(Lights a little dimmer)** Kezia and her mother farewelled the last of the guests. **(They walk with two of the guest from stage left to stage right)**

Guest 1: Never a more delightful garden-party... **(Exit)**

Mrs B: (Waving) I'm so glad you could come.

Guest 2: Kezia, you looked simply divine. **(Exit)**

Kezia: Oh, thank you Meg. You're too kind.

Mrs B: (When they are out of ear shot) All over, all over, thank heavens!

Kezia: But mother, what a wonderful success?

Mrs B: Yes, it has been very successful. But oh, these parties, these parties! Why will you children insist on giving parties? Let's go and have some fresh coffee. I'm exhausted.

In the meantime Mr B. and Isabel have slumped in two of the chairs around the garden table, which holds plates of sandwiches and cupcakes.

Kezia: (Joining them) Have some sandwiches, Daddy dear. I wrote all the flags for them.

Mr B: Thanks! **(Stanley Burnell takes a bite and the sandwich is gone).** I don't suppose you've heard about that beastly accident that happened today?.

Mrs B: (Holding up her hand) My dear, we did. It nearly ruined the party. Kezia even insisted that we should put our party off.

Kezia: Oh, Mother!!

Mr B: Well it was a rather horrible affair all the same. The chap was married too. Lived just below in the lane, and left a wife and half a dozen kiddies, so they say.

An awkward little silence falls.

Mrs B: (Has one of her brilliant ideas) Look at all those sandwiches and cakes, all uneaten, all going to wast. I know! 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. **(She jumps up).** Kezia! Get me the big basket out of the stairs cupboard.

Kezia: But, mother, do you really think it's a good idea?

Mrs B: Of course! What's the matter with you today? An hour or two ago you were insisting on us being sympathetic.

Kezia: Oh well!, if your sure it will be all right.. **(She runs off for the basket).**

Isabel: Did you see the dress that Gladys Bell was wearing? It was positively frightful!

Mrs B: And that hat!

Mr B: (Helping himself to another sandwich) I couldn't help noticing that old Bell is developing a bit of a corporation.

Isabel: I thought the band was rather good.

Mr B: Much too loud.

Isabel: Nobody asked me to sing...

Kezia: (Returning with a large basket) I took all of the left over sandwiches and cakes from the other table.

Mrs B: (Tipping the remaining sandwiches and cakes into the basket) And these too – they're much too much of a temptation here.

Kezia: But Mother, how will we deliver them to the poor woman?

Mrs B: Take them yourself, darling. Run down just as you are. But, wait, take some arum lilies. People of that class are so impressed by arum lilies.

Isabel: The stems might ruin her frock Mother.

Mrs B: So they might; Just in time; only the basket, then. And, Kezia!. **(Following her)** Don't on any account ...

Kezia: What, mother?

Mrs B: No, better not put such ideas into your head! Nothing, run along now.

Kezia walks uncertainly away carrying the basket

Lights or curtain

End of Scene 3

Scene 4: As the Narrator reads, a spot illuminates Kezia as she nervously crosses the darkening stage.

Narrator: It was growing dusk as Kezia shut their garden gate. A big dog ran by like a shadow. The road gleamed white, down in the hollow the little cottages were in deep shade. How quiet it seemed that afternoon. Kezia was going down the hill to somewhere where a man lay dead, and she couldn't realise it. Why couldn't she? She stopped a minute. And it seemed to her that, voices, tinkling spoons, laughter (**Sound effects**). The smell of crushed grass was somehow inside her. She had no room for anything else. How strange. She looked up at the pale sky, and all she thought was:

Kezia: Yes it was a most successful party. (**Exit**)

Narrator: (**As Kezia crosses the stage in the opposite direction, shadowy figures appear**) Now the broad road was crossed. The lane began, smoky and dark. Women in shawls and men in tweed caps hurried by. A low hum came from the mean little cottages. In some of them there was a flicker of light, and a shadow, crab-like, moved across the window. Kezia 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 of people stood outside. Beside the gate an old woman sat watching. The voices stopped as Kezia drew near. The group parted. It was as though she was expected, as though they had known she was coming. Kezia was terribly nervous. Tossing the velvet ribbon over her shoulder, she said to a woman standing by:

Kezia: I-i-is this Mrs Scott's house?

Woman: (**smiling strangely**) It is, my lass.

Kezia: (**As she knocks**) Please help me, God! (**To herself**) I'll just leave the basket and go. **But the door opens. A little woman in black appears from the gloom.**

Kezia: (**Nervously**) Are you Mrs Scott?

Woman: (**Wheedling Voice**) Walk in, please Miss.

Kezia: No. I don't want to come in. I only want to leave this basket that Mother sent – (**But automatically she follows her off stage. Almost immediately they re-enter what is now the interior of the cottage.**)

Woman: Step this way, please Miss. (**A spot lights up a woman at the opposite end of the stage. She is sitting in a chair holding her head in her hands.**)

Woman: Em, Em! It's a young lady (**She turns to Kezia**). I'm 'er sister, You'll excuse 'er, won't you, Miss?

Kezia: Oh, but of course! Please, please don't disturb her. I – I only wanted to leave –

But at that moment the woman at the fire turns around. Her face, puffed up, red, with swollen eyes and swollen lips. She cannot understand why Kezia is there.

Woman: It's all right, my dear "I'll thenk the young lady. You'll excuse 'er, Miss, I'm sure.

The women turns to go. Kezia puts down the basket and follows her. A bed, with the body of a man beneath a sheet, has been pushed onto the far end of the Stage. They approach him.

Woman: You'd like a look at 'im, wouldn't you Miss? Don't be afraid, my lass.
(She draws down the sheet) 'e looks a picture, doesn't he? There's nothing to show.

Narrator: 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 again. His head was sunk in the pillow, his eyes were closed; they were blind under the closed eyelids. He was given up to his dreams. 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 had come to the lane. Happy...happy...all is well, said the sleeping face. This is as it should be. I am content. But all the same you had to cry, and Kezia couldn't go out of the room without saying something to him

Kezia: **(Gives a loud childish sob and mumbles)** Please forgive my hat!

(The Woman pushes the bed off the stage and Kezia rushes in the opposite direction).

Narrator: This time Kezia did not wait for Em's sister. She found her way to the door, and down the path, past all those dark people. **(Kezia comes back on and meets Leslie).** At the corner of the lane she met her brother.

Leslie: **(Stepping out of the shadow).** Is that you Kezia?

Kezia: **(Startled but relieved)** Oh, it's you Bogie. Thank God!

Leslie: Mother was getting anxious about you. Was it all right?

Kezia: Yes, quite! **(She takes his arm and presses up against him).** Oh, Bogey!

Leslie: I say, you're not crying, are you?

Kezia: **(Shakes her head. She is).**

Leslie: **(Putting his arm round her shoulder).** Don't cry. Was it *really* awful?

Kezia: **(Sobbing)** No. No, it was marvellous! But, Bogey - **(She stops and looks up at her brother).** Isn't life... **(She stammers)** Isn't life...

Narrator: But what life was she couldn't explain. No matter. He quite understood.

Leslie: Yes, isn't it, darling? **(And arm in arm they walk from the stage).**

Lights.

End of Play.

