



SILHOUETTES (1907)

By Katherine Mansfield

It is evening and very cold. From my window the laurestinus bush, in this half light looks weighted with snow. It moves languidly, gently, backwards and forwards, and each time I look at it a delicate flower melody fills my brain.

Against the pearl sky the great hills tower, gorse-covered, leonine, magnificently savage. The air is quiet with thin rain, yet, from the karaka tree comes a tremulous sound of birds song.

In the avenue three little boys are crouched under a tree smoking cigarettes. They are quite silent, and though terrified of discovery, their attitudes are full of luxurious abandon.... And the grey smoke floats into the air—their incense, strong and perfumed, to the Great God of the Forbidden.

Two men pass down the avenue talking eagerly.... In the house opposite are four beautiful squares of golden light.... My room is almost in darkness. The bed frightens me—it is so long and white. And the tassel of the window blind moves languidly to and fro. I cannot believe that it is not some living thing...

It is growing very dark. The little boys, laughing shrilly, have left the avenue.

And I, leaning out of my window, alone, peering into the gloom, am seized by a passionate desire for everything that is hidden and forbidden. I want the night to come, and kiss me with her hot mouth, and lead me through an amethyst twilight to the place of the white gardenia. The laurestinus bush moves languidly, gently, backwards and forwards. There is a dull, heavy sound of clocks striking far away, and, in my room, darkness, emptiness, save for the ghostlike bed. I feel to lie there quiet, silent, passively cold would be too fearful—yet—quite a little fascinating.

