

The lady's maid" by
katherine mansfield
essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

"The Lady's Maid" by Katherine Mansfield (1888 to 1923-New Zealand) was first published in 1920. It is the final story in the 1922 collection of her work, *The Garden Party and Other Stories*. The story is told in the first person by Ellen, who has worked as a lady's maid for the same family for many years. Unlike many of her contemporary writers from very comfortable family backgrounds (Mansfield grew up with servants-her father was the Chairman of the Bank of New Zealand) Mansfield is able to convincingly speak through the consciousness of a completely uneducated servant without condescending to the character.

In large portions of the world, servants are now something only for the rather wealthy. Literature centering on women sitting around talking about their servants seems like a throw back to Edwardian times to most, I think. For better or worse, servants are a part of ordinary life here in the Philippines and often work for the same family for many years. You can hear things like "Oh we treat our helpers like part of the family" while at the same time more is spent on the family cats than the helpers are paid. Many of the students at the private elementary school that my youngest daughter attends at age 12 still now have their own personal servants, called a "YaYa". Many have had personal servants all their lives. There was even a very popular TV show and movie about YaYas in which they were treated as country bumpkins of the worst sort. Mansfield depicts in this short work how the master-servant relationship can shape the attitudes of both parties.