

Pond Pictures

Scents at the Pool.

By Virginia Ballen

PART XXIX.

The whiffet moths come in greater numbers tonight because the day has been hot and because the young moon and one big star are fast sinking behind the hill. When the moon is full the lanterns of the pool will not draw many, for moths prefer to dance in the moonlight, and only when the night is dark will they flutter in hosts about the lights of man.

Tonight some go wavering toward the velvet-wooded hill, gleamed over by that hanging sickle lamp, and come wavering back to the pool, as the tip of the cusped light shines a moment through the trees and is quenched.

In the far blackness of the garden the flowers are asleep, their perfume hugged tight in dreaming hearts. The lantern lights do not waken these. But around the pool yellow chrysanthemums are surprised. As a drowsy murmur their scent drifts and tings the water; complains a little across the pool.

From the distant vineyard, which has some night business afloat, comes the lure of ripe grape fragrance.

And Baccaris bushes in insignificant bloom along the trails below make one wonder anew, how such small, crumbly blossoms can hold so heavy a perfume, and why they send their sweetest redolence out through the darkest nights.

The blazing glower of the lighted pool—a burning flame and silver-shot eye under a lowering brow of black—quicken the nostrils.

In the acute radiance of the pond one can, as it were, see to smell keener.

Along with the whiffet moths the skulking dark hurries down tarweed perfumes from the hills, chases up earthy scents from the hollows, and as the odors come into the radius of the lighted pond's scrutiny, the drift and the aroma, the direction and the feel of them is almost palpable.

The glow reaches out to a peach tree sheathed in languorous still green foliage. Inside the fresher screening hang bundles of purple and scarlet leaves. A scorched and prussic perfume is drawn out toward the pool. It blurs with the autumn color. It spans beside the light stream—ruddy tinted.

Night winds fleck the water with delicate whirls of dust. Dust with all irritation taken out of it by the dark. Dust absolved of its noonday grit and become a powdery light, sweet with the fainting essence of earlier heat.

Whiffet moths are drunken on the lanterns' flare, on the wine of night odors and on the wide, warm dark.

They rise far over the pool, they put distance between themselves and the witching glow, to come hurtling down with a flowery, infinitesimal tinkle against the globes.

They blunder against one's face, tangle in one's hair and tumble down one's nose. Ah, the whiffet moths have a fragrance, too—musky and acid-sweet, as of Isabella brushing and Madrono berry skimming. As if a fairy portion of all the night's scents had sifted to the right load for their wee backs and lost no purport settling on their frail wings.