

A Cup of Tea
by
Katherine Mansfield

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What is the Story about?

- ['A Cup of Tea'](#) by Katherine Mansfield deals with an upper-class woman named Rosemary Fell who is a bundle of social snobberies.
- Mansfield shows that whatever the status, a woman of Rosemary's type is a woman after all frail and jealous in spite of her desire to appear otherwise.

Introducing Rosemary Fell

- ‘Rosemary Fell was not exactly beautiful...’ but she was pretty and her husband adored her.
- She was ‘young, brilliant, extremely modern, exquisitely well dressed’ and amazingly well read in the newest of the new books.
- She got married two years ago.
- She is very rich: she often goes to Paris for marketing.

Beginning of the Story

- The story begins one winter afternoon: Rosemary went inside a little antique shop in Curzon Street.
- This was one of those shops where she visited.
- The shopkeeper was ridiculously fond of serving her.
- She was checking “an exquisite little enamel box” with a very fine glaze as if baked in cream.
- The box was too expensive, priced twenty eight guineas, Rosemary asked the shopkeeper to keep it for her implying she would come other day to pick it up.

A Twist in the Story:

- The weather on that winter afternoon was not fine. It was rainy and dark.
- Rosemary was just thinking of having an extra special tea at home before getting into her car.
- At that very instant a young thin, dark poor creature – a beggar girl – named Miss Smith asked for the price of a cup of tea, in a sobbing way.

Rosemary meets Miss Smith

- Rosemary at first was shocked at this extraordinary encounter thinking if it was possible that one did not have money for a cup of tea!
- Then she thought of a more than extraordinary adventure.
- She brought that shivering thin beggar girl to her big cosy house.
- Rosemary wanted to “prove to that girl that wonderful things happen in life, that fairy god mothers (like her) were real, that rich people (like her) had hearts, that woman were sisters”.

Rosemary brings Miss Smith at her home

- The poor beggar girl felt much uncomfortable in her new surroundings amidst warmth, softness, sweet scent, beautiful big bedroom, curtains, wonder furniture, gold cushions and comfy chair of Rosemary's house.
- Rosemary gets busy in showing off her belongs and almost forgot to order for tea.
- She soon remembers and orders for tea and some brandy.
- At this Miss Smith attempts to leap up her sofa and leave the place immediately. She starts crying.
- Rosemary pacifies her and make her take a slight meal of sandwich, bread and butter and tea. The slight meal had a big effect upon the poor beggar girl. She was starving and felt comfortable after the meal.

Philip enters the scene:

- At this juncture Philip, Rosemary's husband entered their room.
- He was visibly dissatisfied but did not show his disapproval.
- Philip asked Rosemary to explain the matter and disapproves her plan to be unnecessarily nice to a vagrant beggar girl.
- Rosemary felt hurt at Philip's disapproval. So Philip had to adopt some other method to get rid of this poor beggar girl.

Philip's Trick

- He aroused feelings of jealousy in Rosemary's mind by praising the beggar girl's beauty.
- Philip called her 'pretty' 'absolutely lovely'. Now Rosemary considered the beggar girl her rival in beauty and love.
- Philip further played the trick by expressing his willingness to dine with that beggar girl together.

End of the Story

- Rosemary was struck by jealousy.
- She did not like her husband finding the beggar girl pretty and absolutely beautiful.
- She paid the poor little girl a present of money and sent her out.
- Rosemary dressed up herself – by doing her hair, darkening her eyes and putting on her pearls – in order to look attractive.
- She informed Philip that the girl is gone.
- The story ends with her question: “Am I pretty?”