

A Cup of Tea

by Katherine Mansfield

Chapter One

A Winter Day and a Beautiful Shop

It was a cold winter afternoon. Rosemary Fell was a young, rich woman. She lived in London. She was not very beautiful, but she was smart, well-dressed, and modern. She loved books, art, and shopping.

That day, she visited a small antique shop on Curzon Street. It was her favorite shop. The shopkeeper liked her very much. He always smiled when she came.

He showed her a small box. It was blue, with flowers and gold on it. Rosemary loved it.

"It's charming!" she said.

"It's twenty-eight guineas, madam," said the shopkeeper.

Rosemary wanted to buy the box, but she didn't decide yet. She left the shop and stepped outside. It was raining, and the street was dark. People walked quickly under their umbrellas.

Suddenly, a voice spoke to her.

"Madam, may I speak to you?" a girl said.

Rosemary saw a thin, tired girl. Her hands were red from the cold. Her clothes were old and wet.

"Would you let me have the price of a cup of tea?" the girl asked.

"Do you have any money at all?" Rosemary asked.

"No, madam."

Rosemary thought this moment was exciting. She had read stories like this. She decided to do something kind.

"Come with me," she said. "Come home and have tea."

The girl looked afraid.

"You're not taking me to the police?" she asked.

"No, no," said Rosemary. "Just tea. Please come."

They got into Rosemary's car.

Chapter Two

Tea at Home

Rosemary and the girl arrived at Rosemary's big house. The house was warm and beautiful. A servant opened the door. Rosemary smiled.

"Come upstairs," she said kindly. "You can get warm."

The girl looked afraid but followed. Rosemary took her to her bedroom. There was a fire, gold cushions, and soft rugs. The girl stood near the door, quiet and nervous.

"Sit here," said Rosemary. "You look cold. Sit by the fire."

"I— I don't know," said the girl.

“Please,” said Rosemary. “Don’t be afraid.”

She helped the girl take off her wet coat and hat. The girl looked very weak. She held the chair and sat down slowly.

“I’m sorry, madam,” she whispered. “I feel sick. I think I will faint.”

Rosemary was shocked. She called the maid.

“Tea! And some brandy!” she said quickly.

But the girl cried,

“No brandy, madam. I never drink brandy. I only want a cup of tea.”

Rosemary felt something strange in her heart. She gave the girl her own lace handkerchief.

“Don’t cry,” she said softly. “Please don’t cry.”

The girl covered her face and cried harder.

“I can’t live like this,” she said. “I can’t do it anymore. I will do something bad to myself.”

Rosemary held her and spoke kindly.

“Don’t say that. You met me today for a reason. We’ll have tea. You can tell me everything. I’ll help you.”

Finally, the girl stopped crying. She looked tired but calm. Rosemary gave her tea, sandwiches, and sweets. She didn’t eat anything herself. She only watched the girl, feeling something new inside—both strong and strange.

Chapter Three

A Visitor and a Secret Thought

The two women sat by the fire. The girl ate and drank. She started to feel better. Rosemary watched her and felt proud. She believed she had done something good.

Then the door opened. It was Rosemary’s husband, Philip.

“Rosemary, may I come in?” he asked.

“Of course,” she said. “This is my friend, Miss—”

The girl stood up slowly. She looked tired but calm. She said:

“Smith, madam.”

“Smith,” Rosemary repeated.

Philip looked at the girl’s coat and hat on the floor. He looked at the girl carefully.

“It’s a beastly afternoon,” he said. “Vile weather.”

He smiled at the girl. Then he looked at Rosemary and asked:

“Can I speak to you in the library?”

Rosemary said, “Of course,” and followed him.

In the library, Philip said:

“Who is she? What’s going on?”

Rosemary laughed.

“I picked her up in the street. She asked for a cup of tea. I brought her home. Isn’t it exciting?”

“But what are you going to do with her?” Philip asked.

“I don’t know yet. I want to help her,” Rosemary answered.

Philip was quiet. Then he said:

“But she’s very pretty.”

Rosemary was surprised. She blushed.

“Pretty? Do you think so? I hadn’t thought about it.”

Philip lit a match and said:

“She’s very lovely. You should know that.”

Suddenly, Rosemary’s heart felt heavy. She returned to her room without a word. She looked at the girl. The girl really was beautiful. Her skin, her eyes, her face—all soft and sweet.

Rosemary walked to her desk. She opened a drawer. She took out some money.

She gave the girl a few pound notes.

“Here. I think it’s better if you go now,” she said gently.

Chapter Four

The Real Question

After giving the girl the money, Rosemary did not say much. The girl took the money, said thank you, and left the house quietly. She never asked for more. She didn’t cry again.

Rosemary watched her leave.

She didn’t feel happy anymore. She didn’t feel proud.

She walked slowly to her bedroom.

She sat at her table. She opened a mirror and looked at her face.

“She is pretty,” Rosemary thought. “She really is.”

Later, Rosemary walked back to the library. Philip was reading a newspaper. She leaned against the door and said:

“Miss Smith won’t dine with us tonight.”

“Oh,” said Philip. “What happened?”

“She wanted to go. I gave her a little money,” said Rosemary. She sat on his knee.

She had just done her hair. She wore pearls. Her eyes were dark and lovely. She touched Philip's face softly.

"Do you like me?" she asked.

Her voice was soft and sweet. She looked at him with shining eyes.

"I like you awfully," said Philip. He smiled and held her.

"Kiss me," Rosemary whispered.

They kissed. But Rosemary had something else to say.

She smiled and said dreamily:

"I saw a lovely little box today. It cost twenty-eight guineas. May I have it?"

Philip laughed.

"You may, little wasteful one."

But Rosemary didn't smile. She put her head on Philip's chest and whispered:

"Philip... am I pretty?"

— THE END —