

## A cup of tea

As she was doing her shopping in some of the best London stores, Rosemary was approached by a beggar girl asking for money for a cup of tea. Rosemary decided to take her home.

*manteau de cheminée*

*s'évanouir*

*cognac*

*se tuer*

*ne pas cesser de servir*

*léger  
emmêlés*

She was just going to take a cigarette off the mantelpiece\* when the girl said quickly, but so lightly and strangely: "I'm very sorry, madam, but I'm going to faint\*. I shall go off, madam, if I don't have something."

"Good heavens, how thoughtless I am!" Rosemary rushed to the bell.

"Tea! Tea at once! And some brandy\* immediately!"

The maid was gone again, but the girl almost cried out: "No, I don't want no brandy. I never drink brandy. It's a cup of tea I want, madam." And she burst into tears.

It was a terrible and fascinating moment. Rosemary knelt beside her chair.

"Don't cry, poor little thing," she said. "Don't cry." And she gave the other her lace\* handkerchief. She really was touched beyond words. She put her arm round those thin, bird-like shoulders.

Now at last the other forgot to be shy, forgot everything except that they were both women, and gasped out: "I can't go on no longer like this. I can't bear it. I can't bear it. I shall do away with myself\*. I can't bear no more."

"You shan't have to. I'll look after you. Don't cry any more. Don't you see what a good thing it was that you met me? We'll have tea and you'll tell me everything. And I shall arrange something. I promise. Do stop crying. It's so exhausting. Please!"

The other girl did stop just in time for Rosemary to get up before the tea came. She had the table placed between them. She plied\* the poor little creature with everything, all the sandwiches, all the bread and butter, and every time her cup was empty she filled it with tea, cream and sugar. People always said sugar was so nourishing. As for herself she didn't eat; she smoked and looked away tactfully so that the other should not be shy.

And really the effect of that slight\* meal was marvellous. When the tea-table was carried away a new being, a light, frail creature with tangled\* hair, dark lips, deep lighted eyes, lay back in the big chair in a kind of sweet languor, looking



at the blaze\*. Rosemary lit a fresh cigarette; it was time to begin.

35 "And when did you have your last meal?" she asked softly.

But at that moment the door-handle turned.

"Rosemary, may I come in?" It was Philip.

"Of course."

He came in. "Oh, I'm so sorry," he said, and stopped and stared.

40 "It's quite all right," said Rosemary, smiling. "This is my friend, Miss —"

"Smith, madam," said the languid figure, who was strangely still and unafraid.

"Smith," said Rosemary. "We are going to have a little talk."

"Oh yes," said Philip. "Quite," and his eye caught sight of the coat and hat on the floor. He came over to the fire and turned his back to it. "It's a beastly\* afternoon," he said curiously, still looking at that listless\* figure, looking at its hands and boots, and then at Rosemary again.

45 "Yes, isn't it?" said Rosemary enthusiastically. "Vile\*."

Philip smiled his charming smile. "As a matter of fact," said he, "I wanted you to come into the library for a moment. Would you? Will Miss Smith excuse us?"

50 The big eyes were raised to him, but Rosemary answered for her: "Of course she will." And they went out of the room together.

"I say\*," said Philip, when they were alone. "Explain. Who is she? What does it all mean?"

Rosemary, laughing, leaned against the door and said: "I picked her up in Curzon Street. Really. She's a real pick-up\*. She asked me for the price of a cup of tea, and I brought her home with me."

55 "But what on earth are you going to do with her?" cried Philip.

"Be nice to her," said Rosemary quickly. "Be frightfully nice to her. Look after her. I don't know how. We haven't talked yet. But show her — treat her — make her feel —"

60 "My darling girl," said Philip, "you're quite mad, you know. It simply can't be done."

"I knew you'd say that," retorted Rosemary. "Why not? I want to. Isn't that a reason? And besides, one's always reading about these things. I decided —"

*feu de cheminée*

*abominable*

*amorphe*

*exécration*

*dis donc*

*rencontre fortuite*



"But," said Philip slowly, and he cut the end of a cigar, "she's so astonishingly pretty." 65

"Pretty?" Rosemary was so surprised that she blushed. "Do you think so? I – I hadn't thought about it."

*ébloui*  
*grossier* "Good Lord!" Philip struck a match. "She's absolutely lovely. Look again, my child. I was bowled over\* when I came into your room just now. However... 70  
I think you're making a ghastly mistake. Sorry, darling, if I'm crude\* and all that. But let me know if Miss Smith is going to dine with us in time for me to look up\* *The Milliner's Gazette*\*."

*consulter – magazine de mode*

"You absurd creature!" said Rosemary, and she went out of the library, but not back to her bedroom. She went to her writing-room and sat down at her desk. 75  
Pretty! Absolutely lovely! Bowled over! Her heart beat like a heavy bell. Pretty! Lovely! She drew her cheque-book towards her. But no, cheques would be no use, of course. She opened a drawer and took out five pound notes, looked at them, put two back, and holding the three squeezed in her hand, she went back to her bedroom. 80

Half an hour later Philip was still in the library, when Rosemary came in.

*regard* "I only wanted to tell you," said she, and she leaned against the door again and looked at him with her dazzled exotic gaze\*, "Miss Smith won't dine with us tonight." 85

*antérieur* Philip put down the paper. "Oh, what's happened? Previous\* engagement?" 85

Rosemary came over and sat down on his knee. "She insisted on going," said she, "so I gave the poor little thing a present of money. I couldn't keep her against her will, could I?" she added softly. Rosemary had just done her hair, darkened her eyes a little, and put on her pearls. She put up her hands and touched Philip's cheeks. 90

*voilée* "Do you like me?" said she, and her tone, sweet, husky\*, troubled him.

"I like you awfully," he said, and he held her tighter. "Kiss me."

There was a pause.

*trente livres* Then Rosemary said dreamily: "I saw a fascinating little box today. It cost 95  
*panier percé* twenty-eight guineas\*. May I have it?"

Philip jumped her on his knee. "You may, little wasteful one\*," said he.

But that was not really what Rosemary wanted to say.

*poitrine* "Philip," she whispered, and she pressed his head against her bosom\*, "am I pretty?"

Katherine MANSFIELD, *The Dove's Nest* (1923)



**Katherine MANSFIELD** (1888-1923) was born in Wellington into a middle-class colonial family. She is New Zealand's most famous writer and is regarded today as one of the masters of the short story. Her first volume of short stories, *In a German Pension* (1911), was not remarkable and achieved little notice, but the stories in *Bliss* (1920) and *The Garden Party* (1922) established her as a major writer. Later volumes of stories include *The Dove's Nest* (1923) and *Something Childish* (1924). During the last five years of her life she suffered from tuberculosis and succumbed to the disease at the age of 35.