**A cup of tea (by Katherine Mansfield)**

*Katherine Mansfield, an outstanding English short-story writer of the 20th century, was born in New Zealand in 1888 and died in 1923. She is the author of a number of excellent short stories which deal with human nature and psychology.  
At the age of eighteen she decided to become a professional writer. Her first short stories appeared in Melbourne in 1907, but literary fame came to her in London after the publication of a collection of short stories called "In a German Pension".  
Katherine Mansfield took a great interest in Russian literature, particularly in the works of Chekhov. In fact, she considered herself to be a pupil of the great Russian writer.*  
  
Rosemary Fell was not exactly beautiful. She was young, brilliant, extremely modern, well dressed and amazingly well read in the newest of the new books. Rosemary had been married two years, and her husband was very fond of her. They were rich, really rich, not just comfortably well-off, so if Rosemary wanted to shop, she would go to Paris as you and I would go to Bond Street.

One winter afternoon she went into a small shop to look at a little box which the shopman had been keeping for her. He had shown it to nobody as yet so that she might be the first to see it.  
"Charming!" Rosemary admired the box. But how much would he charge her for it? For a moment the shopman did not seem to hear. The lady could certainly afford a high price. Then his words reached her, "Twenty-eight guineas, madam."  
"Twenty-eight guineas." Rosemary gave no sign. Even if one is rich... Her voice was dreamy as she answered: "Well, keep it for me, will you? I'll..." The shopman bowed. He would be willing of course, to keep it for her forever.  
Outside rain was falling, there was a cold, bitter taste in the air, and the newly lighted lamps looked sad... At that very moment a young girl, thin, dark, appeared at Rosemary's elbow and a voice, like a sigh, breathed: "Madam, may I speak to you a moment?"  
"Speak to me?" Rosemary turned. She saw a little creature, no older than herself who shivered as though she had just come out of the water.  
"Madam," came the voice, "would you let me have the price of a cup of tea?"  
"A cup of tea?" There was something simple, sincere in that voice; it couldn't be the voice of a beggar. "Then have you no money at all?" asked Rosemary. "None, madam", came the answer. "How unusual!" Rosemary looked at the girl closer. And suddenly it seemed to her such an adventure. Supposing she took the girl home? Supposing she did one of those things she was always reading about or seeing on the stage? What would happen? It would be thrilling. And she heard herself saying afterwards to the amazement of her friends: "I simply took her home with me." And she stepped forward and said to the girl beside her: "Come home to tea with me."  
The girl gave a start. "You're — you're not taking me to the police station?" There was pain in her voice.  
"The police station!" Rosemary laughed out. "Why should I be so cruel? No, I only want to make you warm and to hear — anything you care to tell me. Come along."  
Hungry people are easily led. The footman held the door of the car open, and a moment later they were riding through the dusk.  
"There!" cried Rosemary, as they reached her beautiful big bedroom. "Come and sit down", she said, pulling her big chair up to the fire. "Come and get warm. You look so terribly cold."  
"I daren't, madam," hesitated the girl.  
"Oh, please," — Rosemary ran forward — "you mustn't be frightened, you mustn't, really." And gently she half pushed the thin figure into the chair.  
There was a whisper that sounded like "Very good, madam," and the worn hat was taken off.  
"And let me help you off with your coat, too," said Rosemary.  
The girl stood up. But she held on to the chair with one hand and let Rosemary pull.  
Then she said quickly, but so lightly and strangely: "I'm very sorry, madam, but I'm going to faint. I shall fall, 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 and the girl almost burst into tears. She forgot to be shy, forgot everything except that they were both women, and cried out: "I can't go on any longer like this. I can't stand it. I wish I were dead. I really can't stand it!"  
"You won't have to. I'll look after you. I'll arrange something. Do stop crying. Please."  
The other did stop just in time for Rosemary to get up before the tea came.  
And really the effect of that slight meal was amazing. When the tea-table was carried away, a new girl, a light creature with dark lips and deep eyes lay back in the big chair.  
At that moment the door-handle turned.  
"Rosemary, can I come in?" It was Philip, her husband.  
"Of course."  
He came in. "Oh, I'm so sorry," he said, as if apologizing, and stopped and stared.  
"It's quite all right," said Rosemary, smiling. "This is my friend, Miss —"  
"Smith, madam," said the figure in the chair.  
"Smith," said Rosemary. "We are going to have a little talk."  
Philip smiled his charming smile. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I wanted you to come into the library for a moment. Will Miss Smith excuse us?"  
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 the street. Really. She asked me for the price of a cup of tea and I brought her home with me."  
"Congratulations!" Philip sounded as though he were joking. "But what on earth are you going to do with her?"  
"Be nice to her", said Rosemary quickly, "look after her. I don't know how. We haven't talked yet. Just show her — treat her — make her feel —"  
"But," said Philip slowly, and he cut the end of a cigar, "she's so extremely pretty. She can't be more than twenty."  
"Pretty?" Rosemary was so surprised that she blushed. "Do you think so? I — I hadn't thought about it."  
"Good Lord!" Philip took a match. "She's absolutely lovely. Look again, my child. But let me know if Miss Smith is going to dine with us!"  
"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. Pretty! Absolutely lovely! Her heart beat like a heavy bell. She opened a drawer, took out five pound notes, looked at them, put two back, and holding the three in her hand, went back to her bedroom.  
Half an hour later Philip was still in the library, when Rosemary came in.  
"I only wanted to tell you," said she, and she leaned against the door again, "Miss Smith won't dine with us tonight."  
Philip put down the paper. "Oh, what's happened? Previous engagement?"  
Rosemary came over and sat down on his knee. "She insisted on going," she said, "so I gave the poor little thing a present of money. I couldn't keep her against her will, could I?" she added softly.  
There was a pause.  
Then Rosemary said dreamily: "I saw a wonderful little box today. It cost twenty-eight guineas. Can I have it?"  
"You can, little wasteful one," said he. "You know I can't deny you anything."  
But that was not really what Rosemary wanted to say.  
"Philip," she whispered, "am I pretty?"