

B.COM II (English & Comm. Skills)

Semester -Third

Topic-1

A CUP OF TEA

A Cup of Tea is a short story written by New Zealand's prominent short fiction writer and poet *Katherine Mansfield* in 1922. This story was written on the 11th of January back in early 1922, which was first published in the famous *Story-Teller* magazine and later appeared in Mansfield's short story collection *The Dove's Nest*. The story deals with an upper-class woman. The female protagonist Rosemary Fell, is a bundle of social snobberies. But 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. The story begins with a depiction of the chief characteristics of the female protagonist- Rosemary Fell. She was pretty, young, brilliant, extremely modern, extra ordinarily well dressed, amazingly well read. She was very rich and organized parties; and her parties were the most delicious mixture of the really important people. Her shopping used to be very expensive and choosy.

One winter afternoon Rosemary went inside a little antique shop in Curzon Street. This was the usual shop where the shopkeeper was ridiculously fond of serving her. The man on the counter showed her "an exquisite little enamel box" with a very fine glaze as if baked in cream. The shopman was much interested to sell this creamy box to her as he would gain a big margin. As the box was too expensive, priced twenty eight guineas, Rosemary asked the shopkeeper to keep it for her. The weather, too, on that winter afternoon was not fine. It was rainy and dark. Rosemary also felt a cold bitter taste in the air and thought of having an extra special tea at home. At that very instant a young thin,

dark, shadowy, a little battle poor creature – a beggar girl – later named Miss Smith asked for the price of a cup of tea, in a very sobbing.

Rosemary thought of extra ordinary more than extra ordinary adventure. She brought that shivering thin beggar girl to her big cosy house though the poor girl was very apprehensive. 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 “women were sisters”. The poor beggar girl felt much uncomfortable in her new surroundings amidst warmth, softness, high a sweet scent, beautiful big bedroom, curtains, wonder furniture, gold cushions and comfy chair of Rosemary’s house. After much difficulty Rosemary could handle that poor girl 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.

At this juncture Philip, Rosemary’s husband entered their room and wanted to know all about this real pick up. He tried hard to make Rosemary understand the difficulties in her plans to be nice to this pick up girl, and he explained that Rosemary’s plans were just not feasible. But Philip had to adopt some other method to get rid of this poor beggar girl. He aroused feelings of jealousy in Rosemary’s mind by praising beggar girl’s beauty. He called her ‘pretty’ ‘absolutely lovely’. Now Rosemary considered the beggar girl her rival in beauty and love. Rosemary did not want to lose her husband. 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. As she talked to her husband her tone became husky and troubled. Now she could see the danger in her fascinating plan. Rosemary leaves the library and enters the study room from where she picks up some cash. She returns to her room and hands over the money to the poor girl making her leave

the house. After the girl leaves the house Rosemary joins Philips back in the library and asks him if she could buy the velvet box which wasn't what she wished to ask. After a pause, she whispers, "*Am I pretty?*"

In this way, Mansfield portrays hypocrisy in New Zealand's perturbed society. Rosemary on the surface strikes kind and caring by taking care of Miss. Smith. However, the reality of her intentions is full of hypocrisy. She helps her not out of kindness or cares rather for her own interests. She thought by helping so would give her a chance of upgrading her status and boasting her action. In a similar manner, Mansfield pinpoints her society in which upper classes were taking advantage of virtuous acts for their own benefits. They help the poor to gain praise and material objects.

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Topic-2

The Open Window

"The Open Window" by Saki is a 1914 short story about Framton Nuttel, who is frightened by the fanciful lies of his new neighbours' niece, Vera. Framton Nuttel was suffering from nervousness. He goes to a calm and quiet place in the countryside for treatment. There he calls on a family friend. There he met a fifteen-year old girl named, Vera. She was very calm and confident. She told Nuttel that her aunt, Mrs. Sappleton, would come downstairs soon. Nuttel's sister had told him that he would meet very few people in the countryside. He would feel very unhappy there and his condition would become worse than before. So she would give him letters of introduction to all the people she knew there. Some of them were quite nice.

The young girl, Vera, asked Nuttel if he knew many people there. He told her that he did not know anybody. In fact, his sister had visited the place about four years ago. She had given him letters of introduction to some of the people. On being asked, he told Vera that he knew only her aunt's name and address. Vera, told Nuttel that a tragedy had happened in the family about three years ago. She pointed to a large glass window. It opened on to a lawn. It was kept wide open even on an October afternoon. Nuttel asked the girl if that tragedy had something to do with the window. The girl told him that it concerned her aunt's husband and two brothers. They had gone out for shooting. This happened exactly on this day three years ago. They went out through that window. But they never came back. It was because they were swallowed up by the wet spongy ground. Their bodies were never recovered. The girl's aunt, Mrs. Sappleton, always thought that they would come back some day. They would come through that window along with their dog as they

used to do. That was why the window was kept open every evening till it was dark. The aunt often told the girl how they went out. Sometimes Vera, too, had a feeling that they would walk through that window.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Sappleton entered the room and apologised for coming late. She hoped that the open window did not bother Mr. Nuttel. She told him that her husband and brothers would come home straight from shooting. They would enter the house through the open window. They had gone to shoot birds in the marsh. So they would spoil the carpet as their shoes would be muddy. Mrs. Sappleton went on talking about the shooting and the shortage of birds. To Framton Nuttel, it was completely horrible. He tried to turn the talk to a less horrible topic. But he was not fully successful. He knew that Mrs. Sappleton was giving him only a part of her attention. Her eyes were directed to the window. The doctor had advised Nuttel to take complete rest. He should avoid mental excitement. He should also not do any exercise needing great physical strength. Framton Nuttel wrongly thought that strangers were interested in his illnesses and weaknesses.

Mrs. Sappleton was not much interested in what Nuttel was saying. Suddenly she looked towards the window. Mrs. Sappleton said with a cry that they had come at last. They were in time for tea. They looked as if they were covered with mud. Framton Nuttel trembled with fear. He turned towards the girl to express sympathy. But the girl was looking through the window. There was horror in her eyes. Framton had also a feeling of strange fear. He swung round in his seat and looked towards the window. It was dusk now. Nuttel saw three figures walking across the lawn towards the window. They all carried guns. One of them had a white coat hung over his shoulders. A brown coloured dog followed them. They came silently near the house. One of them sang : “I say, Bertie, why do you bound ?”

Framton Nuttel took his stick and coat. He walked through the hall door, along the pathway and reached the front gate. Thus he made a hasty retreat. A cyclist had to run into the hedge to avoid collision with him. The figure with the raincoat came in through the window. He asked who was the man who had rushed out of the house. Mrs. Sappleton told him that he was one Mr. Nuttel. He was an extraordinary man. He could talk only about his illnesses. He went away without a word of goodbye or apology. It appeared as if he had seen a ghost.

The girl explained that Nuttel rushed out of the house because he was afraid of the dog. He had told the girl that he was terribly afraid of dogs. Once a group of dogs chased him into a graveyard. He had to spend the night in a newly dug grave. The dogs were growling all around him. The story ended at the brevity and storytelling quality of the girl. The main themes in “The Open Window” are appearances versus reality, the discomfort of company, and the suspension of disbelief. Vera's stories present false appearances, concealing the reality behind them and causing great misunderstanding for Framton. The interactions between Framton and the Sappleton family are uncomfortable due to the situation at hand, Framton's character, and Vera's untruths.

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Topic-3

A Work of Art

In A Work of Art by Anton Chekhov we have the theme of gratitude, poverty, perception, morality, independence, paralysis and social opinion. Taken from his The Complete Short Stories collection the story is narrated in the first person by an unnamed narrator and after reading the story the reader realises that Chekhov may be exploring the theme of gratitude. Sasha is grateful to Dr. Koshelkov for saving his life and as such presents him with an antique candelabra due to the fact that he cannot pay Dr. Koshelkov for his services by way of financial means. However Dr. Koshelkov though he likes the candelabra realises that he cannot publically display it in his office. This may be important as Chekhov may be using the candelabra to explore the theme of perception. Sasha considers the candelabra to be a work of art while Dr. Koshelkov thinks otherwise. He considers it improper to display the candelabra in his office. As too does Uhov when he is presented with the Candelabra by Koshelkov. So inappropriate is the candelabra that Uhov tries to pass it on to Shashkin. All three men, Koshelkov, Uhov and Shashkin have one thing in common. They believe that candelabra can be a piece of art but it's more difficult to preserve than it's worth it. That might speak a lot about the perception of society in the field of art. Beauty is apparent in a candelabra but none of the three men are prepared to maintain the candelabra because of the morality that society puts on the individual. None of them are sufficiently autonomous to preserve the candelabra and forget what others can tell them when they see it. That is perhaps the argument Chekhov tries to communicate. He can claim that Koshelkov, Uhov and Shashkin are somewhat paralysed or tied to a routine that makes them too concerned about the view of society. None of the men appear to

have an independent voice unlike Sasha who can see the real beauty in the candelabra. Their lives seem to be dictated by the social opinion of others. Who may view all three men in an unfavourable light should they keep the candelabra and display it in their home or office. Which really leaves the reader thinking that maybe all three men are defined by how others may view them.

Something that is interesting considering that all three men are successful in their professions. They do not need to rely on the opinion of others and it may be a case that they are actually afraid of upsetting the status quo. It may also be a case that all three men realise that should they step out of the boundaries that society has set them. They will be isolated and judged by others. Which would directly impact on their income. Dr. Koshelkov would lose patients. Uhov would lose clients and Shashkin would lose an audience to play to. Each man may be comfortable with their place in society and as such do not want to jeopardize not only their income but their reputation by keeping the candelabra. This may be important as it again suggests that neither of the three men are willing to be independently minded and are stuck in a routine that society dictates to them. If anything Chekhov may be suggesting that not only are the three men non-progressive but society too may also be non-progressive when it comes to its opinion of the candelabra.

The end of the story is also interesting as Chekhov manages to add humour to the story. Sasha believes he has found the match to the candelabra and presents it to Dr. Koshelkov. Little does Sasha realise that it is the same candelabra that he is presenting to Dr. Koshelkov for a second time. It is as though Chekhov, through humour, is affording Dr. Koshelkov the opportunity to think differently or change his mind about the candelabra. However it is clear to the reader that Dr. Koshelkov has not changed his mind. He is aware that he now has to go back to Uhov who will go to Shashkin. Who in turn will attempt to sell the candelabra back to Madame Smirnov (Sasha's mother). The paralysis

that Koshelkov, Uhov and Shashkin may feel due to the pressures of society is mirrored by a second attempt by all three men to do what they had previously done. In essence they are doing the same thing again which suggests very little movement on behalf of all three men. They remain under the influence of social opinion and as such none of the men will keep the candelabra. Their lives being dictated to them by what society thinks. Rather than showing any independent thought all three men remain fixed in their beliefs. Which again suggests that all three men are paralysed by society's opinion.

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Topic-4

Some Words with a Mummy

"Some Words With a Mummy" is a satire on the notion of progress. It is also labeled as one of the grotesques. The tale begins with the narrator's receiving a letter from his good friend, Doctor Ponnonner. Ponnonner is very excited because he has been granted permission to examine a mummy. The letter ends with Ponnonner asking the narrator to be present at the examination. As soon as the narrator arrives at Ponnonner's house, the examination begins. After removing three cases, the examiners finally reach the body, which is wrapped in papyrus. After removing the papyrus, they find the flesh in excellent condition, with no noticeable odor. As Ponnonner is about to begin his internal examination, one of the men suggests an experiment with electricity. The rest of the men go along with the suggestion, and they send a series of electric charges through different spots on the mummy's body. After the third such charge, the mummy sits up and chastises two of the men for their absurd behavior. The two explain that their examination was for the advancement of science, and the mummy, named Allamistakeo, accepts their apology for the wounds he has received.

The men are amazed at the miracle they have witnessed, and they begin to ask Allamistakeo questions. Allamistakeo proceeds to explain that he was embalmed alive and is now in the same condition he was in during the embalming process. He also says that he is a member of the Scarabaeus family, who have an average life span of 800 years. In addition, he adds that there were many men of Scarabaeus blood who were embalmed alive. The men then begin to explain how advanced their society is, but Allamistakeo responds to each

claim and proves that things are not all that much more advanced than in his day. He says that Great Movements "were awfully common things in his day, and as for Progress, it was at one time quite a nuisance, but it never progressed."

Thus, in their discussion with Allamistakeo, the men attempt to exalt their time as one of unprecedented knowledge and technology. Again and again, Allamistakeo is able to prove that the technology in his time was not inferior, and often superior, to the modern equivalents. The narrator, who at first is presented as an intelligent, educated man, is later revealed to be completely ignorant. He asks Allamistakeo a series of questions intended to prove that modern technology is superior and each time he asks questions that, ultimately, support Allamistakeo's argument. Even when one of the men tries to stop him and suggests that he consult historical texts before asking his questions, he continues. When the man mentions Ptolemy, the narrator's response is "whoever Ptolemy is". In the end, the only reason the men can consider themselves the victors of the debate comes down to cough drops.

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Topic-5

The Gift of the Magi

The Gift of the Magi, short story by O. Henry, published in the *New York Sunday World* in 1905 and then collected in *The Four Million* (1906). The story concerns James and Della Dillingham Young, a young couple who, despite their poverty, individually resolve to give each other an elegant gift on Christmas Eve. The story opens with \$1.87. That's all Della Dillingham Young has to buy a present for her beloved husband, Jim. And the next day is Christmas. Faced with such a situation, Della promptly bursts into tears on the couch, which gives the narrator the opportunity to tell us a bit more about the situation of Jim and Della. The short of it is they live in a shabby flat and they're poor. But they love each other.

Once Della's recovered herself, she goes to a mirror to let down her hair and examine it. Della's beautiful, brown, knee-length hair is one of the two great treasures of the poor couple. The other is Jim's gold watch. Her hair examined, Della puts it back up, sheds a tear, and bundles up to head out into the cold. She leaves the flat and walks to Madame Sofronie's hair goods shop, where she sells her hair for twenty bucks. Now she has \$21.87 cents. With her new funds, Della is able to find Jim the perfect present: an elegant platinum watch chain for his watch. It's \$21, and she buys it. Excited by her gift, Della returns home and tries to make her now-short hair presentable (with a curling iron). She's not convinced Jim will approve, but she did what she had to do to get him a good present. When she finishes with her hair, she gets to work preparing coffee and dinner. Jim arrives at 7pm to find Della waiting by the door and stares fixedly at her, not able to understand that Della's hair is gone. Della can't understand quite what his reaction means.

After a little while, Jim snaps out of it and gives Della her present, explaining that his reaction will make sense when she opens it. Della opens it and cries out in joy, only to burst into tears immediately afterward. Jim has given her the set of fancy combs she's wanted for ages, only now she has no hair for them. Jim nurses Della out of her sobs. Once she's recovered she gives Jim his present, holding out the watch chain. Jim smiles, falling back on the couch. He sold his watch to buy Della's combs, he explains. He recommends they put away their presents and have dinner. As they do so, the narrator brings the story to a close by pronouncing that Della and Jim are the wisest of everyone who gives gifts. They are the magi.