

Name: Prajakta Jagdish Meshram

Class: B.A second year

Author

Katharine Mansfield

Katherine Mansfield, pseudonym of Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp, married name Kathleen Mansfield Murry, (born October 14, 1888, Wellington, New Zealand—died January 9, 1923, Gurdjieff Institute, near Fontainebleau, France), New Zealand-born English master of the short story, who evolved a distinctive prose style with many overtones of poetry.

The Doll's House summary

The Burnell's family friend Mrs Hay sent a gift a Doll's House as a gift for her recent visit to the Burnell's home. Pat, the handyman kept that box beside the feed room door. The smell of the paint was sweet like Mrs Hay. But smell of the paint was so strong that it could make anyone sick that Aunt Beryl's opinion.

The covering of the doll's house is taken off .It is painted a "dark, oily, spinach green," with two chimneys and a door that looks "like a little slab of toffee." There are also four real windows and a front porch, "painted yellow, with big lumps of congealed paint hanging along the edge." The newness of the house is so exciting that no one else seems to mind the smell.

The hook on the side of the doll's house is stuck, so Pat pries it open with his penknife. When the front of the house swings open, all of the rooms are on display at once. When knocking on the door of a real

house, one can only peer in and see the front hallway, but the doll's house opens entirely—allowing one to see everything, “the way God opens houses at the dead of night.”

The Burnell girls have never seen anything so wonderful before and they stare looking every detail things in the house—from the pictures painted on the walls, to the red carpet, plush pillows, beds with actual bedspreads, and kitchen fit with a small stove. Kezia, the youngest, notices a small lamp in particular, which sits on the dining room table and is filled with a liquid that looks like oil. She thinks the lamp is the best part of the house because it fits so perfectly, whereas the father and mother dolls look a little too big for the house and do not seem to belong inside it.

The Burnell sisters were very excited to tell about the doll house to everyone in the school. Isabel wants to tell everyone first because she is eldest girl and she warns her sisters that before her no will tell anyone about this. She also emphasise that she choose the first girls who will come to see the doll house.

The Burnell sisters decide to allow two girls at a time to see the doll house in the courtyard. But they are only allowed them to see the doll house not for tea and to play with them in the house.

The Burnell sister didn't brag anything about the doll the house before the bell rings. But Isabel was mysteriously whispering to the girls that she has something to tell in the playtime. All the girls gathered excitedly towards Isabel to hear that what Isabel has to share. But as usual Kelveys sisters, Lil and Else, was excluded. They were poorest girls not only in the school but in the entire village. So they were often isolated from the girls circle.

There was only one school in that village. And Burnells family had no choice but to send their daughters at that school. It is only a village school, and the family laments that all kinds of children must mix

together—“the Judge’s little girls, the doctor’s daughters, the storekeeper’s children and the milkman’s.”

The Kelveys, in particular, are the family everyone tries to avoid. Lil and Else’s mother is a washerwoman, and their father is out of the picture, leaving everyone to speculate that he is in prison. Many of the children at school are not allowed to talk to them, and the schoolteacher even uses a “special voice” to address Lil when she brings her “common-looking” flowers.

The dressing of Lil and Else is so bad and unpleasant that their poverty is very noticeable. Lil wears a dress made from hand-me-down scraps that her mother collects from the homes she cleans; her skirt is made from the Burnells’ old tablecloth and her sleeves from the Logan family’s curtains. Meanwhile, Else wears a white dress that is much too big for her and a pair of old boy’s boots. To top it off, Lil’s hat used to belong to the postmistress and looks ridiculous on a little girl.

Else is a little strange girl. She is quite girl who rarely smiles. She has short hair, a tiny frame, and big, expressive eyes like “a little white owl.” She walks around behind Lil, holding on to the hem of her sister’s skirt, tugging it when she wants something. Though they rarely speak, the Kelveys always understand each another.

The Kelveys was sitting away from the girls and tried to listen all girls chat. Sometimes a girl will turn and sneer at them, but Lil only smiles back. Isabel, meanwhile, spills all the juicy details of the Doll’s House, and Kezia has to remind her to mention the lamp. No one pays the lamp any attention, however, too excited to find out who Isabel will choose to see the house first. She picks Lena Logan and Emmie Cole.

The Doll’s house becomes the interesting topic among the school girls and everyone starts flattering Isabel, and kisses her for to get the chance to see the Doll’s House. All girls sit together and eats “thick mutton sandwiches and big slabs of johnny cake spread with butter”.

Lil and Else sit away from them and eat simple plain jam sandwiches “out of a newspaper soaked with large red blobs.”

In a flashback, Kezia asks her mother if she may invite the Kelvey’s to see the doll’s house but Mrs. Burnell refuses. When asked why, she brushes Kezia off and tells her that Kezia knows exactly why the Kelveys are not to come.

After some days later, all girl in the school have seen doll’s house except Lil and Else. Bored of talking about the house, the girls begin gossiping about the Kelveys instead. Emmie Cole starts it, whispering to Isabel that Lil will become a washerwoman just like her mother. As she talks, she moves her head in a way she has seen her mother do, imitating the sort of gossip that the adults spread regularly. Suddenly, Lena Logan suggests going up to the Kelveys and asking them if they’ll grow up to be servants. Jessie May eggs Lena on, and Lena tells the other girls to watch her as she runs over, giggling, to where the Kelvey sisters sit.

When Lena approach towards them, Lil and Else stop eating and hide their sandwiches. Lena asks Lil, “Is it true you’re going to be a servant when you grow up, Lil Kelvey?” When Lil does not respond except with a shamefaced smile, the other girls snicker, and Lena, upset that her first insult didn’t work, hisses, “Yah, her father’s in prison!” and runs away.

When the other girls hear Lena’s insult, they are so excited by the cruelty of it that they run off hopping, screaming, and playing like a wild mob. They begin playing with a jump rope with more excitement than ever before.

That afternoon, some visitors have arrived at Burnell’s home, so Pat comes to pick Burnell’s sisters up to home to greet them. Isabel and Lottie go to change into fresh pinafores, but Kezia sneaks out to the courtyard to swing on its big white gate.

When Kezia was swinging on gate she notices two dots in the distance. As they get closer, she realizes its Lil and Else. She jumps off the white gates and considers running off, but changes her mind, jumping back on the gate and swinging it open to greet the Kelveys.

Kezia says hello and asks the Kelveys if they want to come inside and see the doll's house. Lil and Else are surprised, and Lil swiftly shakes her head no. When Kezia asks why not, she gasps and tells Kezia that her mother told their mother that they weren't supposed to talk to Kezia. Kezia ignores it, saying that it doesn't matter and that no one is looking. When Lil again refuses to enter the courtyard, she feels a little tug on her dress. When she turns, she sees Else looking at her imploringly. Else jerks Lil's skirt again, indicating that she wants to see the house.

Else and Lil follow Kezia inside, and Kezia opens the doll's house for them. When Kezia was showing them a small house, Aunt Beryl, shouted on her for letting Kelvey inside. Aunt Beryl comes into the courtyard and furiously shoos the Kelveys away and slams the dollhouse shut. The Kelveys run off quickly to the road.

Willie Brent sent some letter to Aunt Barely, and she had terrible afternoon due to that letters. In the letter, Willie threatened to come to the front door if she didn't meet him in Pullman's Bush later that night. He might be her lover. She feels better now that she has scolded Kezia and scared off Lil and Else.

Meanwhile, Lil and Else run off, stopping to rest by a "big red drain-pipe" on the roadside. They sit silently and look over the fields to the Logan's cows. Else nudges closer to her sister and smiles. She speaks for the first time in the story, saying, "I seen the little lamp."

Themes

Social class

The main theme in this short story is the theme of social class and how there is a strict fence between those who are well-off and those who aren't whether it be a social or economical one. The Kelveys are the center of this theme as a poor family. They are scrutinized to the point where the socialization of their two children is forbidden with other kids their age. The entire well-off society cast them off, so much so that the kids are faced with humiliation in school not only from other children, but from teachers as well. This wall built to keep them out, dooms the children to the same fate as their parents' without hope of progression. This cruelty and unfairness portrayed in the story is unbearable, but it is the decision of societal majority and one can only lament the fate of the two innocent girls who can only dream of a doll's house.

Child innocence and cruelty

Children are known for having no censorship when it comes to their honesty and their mimicking of what they've seen or heard from their families. Such is the case in this story where the cruelty of the schoolmates, the Burnell older girl especially, is most vivid and most impactful in their intentional alienation of the Kelvey girls. Their cruelty goes as far as to insulting the two poor girls, using the gossips they heard from their families and mimicking their parents' mannerisms. The children are groomed with hatred and cruelty by their authoritative figures, and their innocence doesn't allow them to realize the consequences of their actions.