



A Cup of Tea

By Amy Ephron
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Introduction

Rosemary Fell leads an utterly charmed life. Engaged to marry Philip Alsop, a handsome, self-made shipping magnate, Rosemary devotes her days to planning for their impending nuptials and indulging herself in whatever gives her and Philip pleasure. Her extraordinary wealth and the many friends in her social circle in New York City keep her occupied and insulated from the gritty realities of urban life.

But after a visit to her favorite antique shop, Rosemary encounters Eleanor Smith, a penniless young woman who begs Rosemary for enough money for a cup of tea. Out of compassion and curiosity concerning the woman's straitened circumstances, Rosemary invites Eleanor out of the rain and into her carriage, and she whisks her to her own well-appointed home. While Eleanor warms herself by the fire, she exchanges a fateful glance with Philip, Rosemary's fiancé, and suddenly Rosemary's whimsical

decision to bring a stranger into her home sends the smooth course of her life reeling. Rosemary sends Eleanor on her way, but she cannot undo this chance encounter, which puts into play a tempestuous and all-consuming triangle -- throwing all three of their lives into a sweeping whirlwind.

Questions for Discussion

1. Describe Rosemary Fell. Does the activities that she engage in and the friends she surrounds herself with give you a clear sense of her personality?
2. "It was more than an accident of birth and a length of pavement that separated these two women." How are Eleanor Smith and Rosemary Fell different from one another?
3. Discuss the social milieu of **A Cup of Tea**. How would you characterize the experiences and opportunities for people in less financially secure stations?
4. Rosemary's gesture of kindness toward Eleanor seems charitable on one level, but motivated at the same time by a more selfish desire to glimpse the world through another's eyes. How did you interpret Rosemary's invitation to Eleanor?
5. Describe the different roles Jane Howard plays as friend to both Philip Alsop and Rosemary Fell. To what extent is Jane responsible for the romantic relationship that evolves between Eleanor and Philip?
6. While he has been drawn into Rosemary Fell's social circle, Philip Alsop is not, strictly speaking, to the manner born. Did you think that Philip's intense attraction to Eleanor, a woman of a lower station and background, might be connected to his own more humble origins?
7. "It would be easy to say the war has made us do things we otherwise wouldn't have." How does the backdrop of World War I affect the characters of **A Cup of Tea** and their relationships?
8. How does Eleanor respond to the discovery that she is pregnant? How does she support herself and how does she maintain a veneer of respectability as a single mother in a society where such pregnancies are frowned upon?
9. Discuss the comic aspects of the séance scene with Madame Olga at the Fell house. Were you surprised by the unexpected way in which the séance achieved its desired effect?
10. In what respects is **A Cup of Tea** a tragedy? Why do you think the author chose to conclude her story at such a suspenseful moment? How did such a dramatic ending impact your appreciation of the story?

About the Author

Amy Ephron is a novelist and screenwriter. She is the author of **One Sunday Morning**, **White Rose: Una Rosa Blanca**, **Cool Shades**, **Bruised Fruit**, and **Biodegradable Soap**. She lives in Los Angeles.