



Learn English Through Stories

D Series

D59

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1. The Little Girl

Katherine Mansfield

To the little girl he was a figure to be feared and avoided. Every morning before going to work he came into her room and gave her a casual kiss, to which she responded with "Goodbye, Father". And oh, there was a glad sense of relief when she heard the noise of the carriage growing fainter and fainter down the long road!

In the evening when he came home she stood near the staircase and heard his loud voice in the hall. "Bring my tea into the drawing-room... Hasn't the paper come yet? Mother, go and see if my paper's out there — and bring me my slippers."

"Kezia," Mother would call to her, "if you're a good girl you can come down and take off father's boots." Slowly the girl would slip down the stairs, more slowly still across the hall, and push open the drawing-room door.

By that time he had his spectacles on and looked at her over them in a way that was terrifying to the little girl.

"Well, Kezia, hurry up and pull off these boots and take them outside. Have you been a good girl today?"

"I d-d-don't know, Father."

"You d-d-don't know? If you stutter like that Mother will have to take you to the doctor."

She never stuttered with other people — had quite given it up — but only with Father, because then she was trying so hard to say the words properly.

"What's the matter? What are you looking so wretched about? Mother, I wish you taught this child not to appear on the brink of suicide... Here, Kezia, carry my teacup back to the table carefully."

He was so big — his hands and his neck, especially his mouth when he yawned. Thinking about him alone was like thinking about a giant.

On Sunday afternoons Grandmother sent her down to the drawing-room to have a "nice talk with Father and Mother". But the little girl always found Mother reading and Father stretched out on the sofa, his handkerchief on his face, his feet on one of the best cushions, sleeping soundly and snoring.

She sat on a stool, gravely watched him until he woke and stretched, and asked the time — then looked at her.

“Don’t stare so, Kezia. You look like a little brown owl.”

One day, when she was kept indoors with a cold, her grandmother told her that father’s birthday was next week, and suggested she should make him a pin-cushion for a gift out of a beautiful piece of yellow silk.

Laboriously, with a double cotton, the little girl stitched three sides. But what to fill it with? That was the question. The grandmother was out in the garden, and she wandered into Mother’s bedroom to look for scraps. On the bed-table she discovered a great many sheets of fine paper, gathered them up, tore them into tiny pieces, and stuffed her case, then sewed up the fourth side.

That night there was a hue and cry in the house. Father’s great speech for the Port Authority had been lost. Rooms were searched; servants questioned. Finally Mother came into Kezia’s room.

“Kezia, I suppose you didn’t see some papers on a table in our room?”

“Oh yes,” she said, “I tore them up for my surprise.”

“What!” screamed Mother. “Come straight down to the dining-room this instant.”

And she was dragged down to where Father was pacing to and fro, hands behind his back.

“Well?” he said sharply.

Mother explained.

He stopped and stared at the child.

“Did you do that?”

“N-n-no”, she whispered.

“Mother, go up to her room and fetch down the damned thing — see that the child’s put to bed this instant.”

Crying too much to explain, she lay in the shadowed room watching the evening light make a sad little pattern on the floor.

Then Father came into the room with a ruler in his hands.

“I am going to beat you for this,” he said.

“Oh, no, no”, she screamed, hiding under the bedclothes.

He pulled them aside.

“Sit up,” he ordered, “and hold out your hands. You must be taught once and for all not to touch what does not belong to you.”

“But it was for your b-b-birthday.”

Down came the ruler on her little, pink palms.

Hours later, when Grandmother had wrapped her in a shawl and rocked her in the rocking-chair, the child clung to her soft body.

“What did God make fathers for?” she sobbed.

“Here’s a clean hanky, darling. Blow your nose. Go to sleep, pet; you’ll forget all about it in the morning. I tried to explain to Father but he was too upset to listen tonight.”

But the child never forgot. Next time she saw him she quickly put both hands behind her back and a red colour flew into her cheeks.

The Macdonalds lived next door. They had five children. Looking through a gap in the fence the little girl saw them playing ‘tag’ in the evening. The father with the baby, Mao, on his shoulders, two little girls hanging on to his coat pockets ran round and round the flower-beds, shaking with laughter. Once she saw the boys turn the hose on him—and he tried to catch them laughing all the time.

Then it was she decided there were different sorts of fathers.

Suddenly, one day, Mother became ill, and she and Grandmother went to hospital.

The little girl was left alone in the house with Alice, the cook. That was all right in the daytime, but while Alice was putting her to bed she grew suddenly afraid.

“What’ll I do if I have a nightmare?” she asked.

“I often have nightmares and then Grannie takes me into her bed—I can’t stay in the dark—it all gets ‘whispery’ ...”

“You just go to sleep, child,” said Alice, pulling off her socks, “and don’t you scream and wake your poor Pa.”

But the same old nightmare came — the butcher with a knife and a rope, who came nearer and nearer, smiling that dreadful smile, while she could not move, could only stand still, crying out, “Grandma! Grandma!” She woke shivering to see Father beside her bed, a candle in his hand. “What’s the matter?” he said.

“Oh, a butcher — a knife — I want Grannie.” He blew out the candle, bent down and caught up the child in his arms, carrying her along the passage to the big bedroom. A newspaper was on the bed. He put away the paper, then carefully tucked up the child. He lay down beside her. Half asleep still, still with the butcher’s smile all about her it seemed, she crept close to him, snuggled her head under his arm, held tightly to his shirt.

Then the dark did not matter; she lay still.

“Here, rub your feet against my legs and get them warm,” said Father.

Tired out, he slept before the little girl. A funny feeling came over her. Poor Father, not so big, after all — and with no one to look after him. He was harder than Grandmother, but it was a nice hardness. And every day he had to work and was too tired to be a Mr Macdonald... She had torn up all his beautiful writing... She stirred suddenly, and sighed.

“What’s the matter?” asked her father. “Another dream?”

“Oh,” said the little girl, “my head’s on your heart. I can hear it going. What a big heart you’ve got, Father dear.”

Comprehension Questions and Answers

Question 1: Why does Kezia feel relieved when her father leaves for work in the morning?

Question 2: What task is Kezia often asked to do when her father comes home?

Question 3: Why does Kezia stutter when speaking to her father?

Question 4: What gift does Kezia decide to make for her father's birthday?

Question 5: What mistake does Kezia make while preparing the pin-cushion?

Question 6: How does Kezia's father react when he learns she destroyed his speech?

Question 7: What does Kezia observe about the Macdonald family that makes her think about "different sorts of fathers"?

Question 8: What happens when Kezia has a nightmare while her mother and grandmother are away?

Question 9: How does Kezia's perception of her father change by the end of the story?

Question 10: What does Kezia mean when she says, "What a big heart you've got, Father dear"?

Answers

Answer 1: Kezia feels relieved because she fears her father, who is an intimidating figure to her, and his departure allows her to feel a sense of freedom and safety.

Answer 2: Kezia is asked to take off her father's boots and carry them outside.

Answer 3: Kezia stutters only with her father because she is nervous and trying hard to say the words properly in his intimidating presence.

Answer 4: Kezia decides to make a pin-cushion out of yellow silk for her father's birthday.

Answer 5: Kezia tears up her father's important speech papers to use as stuffing for the pin-cushion, not knowing their significance.

Answer 6: Kezia's father is angry and punishes her by striking her hands with a ruler.

Answer 7: Kezia sees Mr. Macdonald playfully interacting with his children, laughing and running around, which contrasts with her own father's stern demeanour.

Answer 8: Kezia wakes up crying from a nightmare about a butcher, and her father comforts her by taking her into his bed.

Answer 9: Kezia begins to see her father as less intimidating and more human, realizing he is tired and vulnerable, which fosters empathy and closeness.

Answer 10: Kezia's comment reflects her newfound understanding of her father's caring nature, as she feels his heartbeat while lying close to him, symbolizing their emotional connection.

2. Grammar page

Do, Does and Did

Use **do**, **does** and **did** to talk about actions.

Use **do** with the pronouns **I**, **you**, **we** and **they**, and with **plural nouns**. Use **does** with the pronouns **he**, **she** and **it**, and **singular nouns**.

Did is the **simple past tense** of **do** and **does**.



Dad **does**
the dishes.



Mom **does**
the cooking.



We always
do exercise together.

He **does** such interesting work.

They **do** amazing tricks.



Who **did** this drawing?
Henry did.

Sally **did** her hair in front
of the mirror.

They **did** the dusting and
cleaning.

Jane **did** all the laundry
by herself.

You **did** well in the test.

I **did** poorly on my exam.