



## SUSANNAH (1923)

By Katherine Mansfield

Of course there would have been no question of their going to the exhibition if Father had not had the tickets given to him. Little girls cannot expect to be given treats that cost extra money when only to feed them, buy them clothes, pay for their lessons and the house they live in takes their kind generous Father all day and every day working hard from morning till night— “except Saturday afternoons and Sundays,” said Susannah.

“Susannah!” Mother was very shocked. “But do you know what would happen to your poor Father if he didn’t have a holiday on Saturday afternoons and Sundays?”

“No,” said Susannah. She looked interested. “What?”

“He would die,” said their mother impressively.

“Would he?” said Susannah, opening her eyes. She seemed astounded, and Sylvia and Phyllis, who were four and five years older than she, chimed in with, “Of course,” in a very superior tone. What a little silly-billy she was not to know that! They sounded so convinced and cheerful that their mother felt a little shaken and hastened to change the subject. . . .

“So that is why,” she said a little vaguely, “you must each thank Father separately before you go.”

“And then will he give us the money?” asked Phyllis.

“And then I shall ask him for whatever is necessary,” said their mother firmly. She sighed suddenly and got up. “Run along, children and ask Miss Wade to dress you and get ready herself and then to come down to the dining-room. And now, Susannah, you are not to let go Miss Wade’s hand from the moment you are through the gates until you are out again.”

“Well—what if I go on a horse?” inquired Susannah.

“Go on a horse—nonsense, child! You’re much too young for horses! Only big girls and boys can ride.”

“There’re roosters for small children,” said Susannah undaunted. “I know, because Irene Heywood went on one and when she got off she fell over.”

“All the more reason why you shouldn’t go on,” said her mother.

But Susannah looked as though falling over had no terrors for her. On the contrary.

About the exhibition, however, Sylvia and Phyllis knew as little as Susannah. It was the first that had ever come to their town. One morning, as Miss Wade, their lady help, rushed them along to the Heywoods’, whose governess they shared, they had seen carts piled with



great long planks of wood, sacks, what looked like whole doors, and white flagstaffs, passing through the wide gate of the Recreation Ground. And by the time they were bowled home to their dinners, there were the beginnings of a high thin fence, dotted with flagstaffs, built all round the railings. From inside came a tremendous noise of hammering, shouting, clanging; a little engine, hidden away, went *Chuff-chuff-chuff*. *Chuff!* And round, woolly balls of smoke were tossed over the palings.

First it was the day after the day after tomorrow, then plain day after tomorrow, then tomorrow, and at last, the day itself. When Susannah woke up in the morning, there was a little gold spot of sunlight watching her from the wall; it looked as though it had been there for a long time, waiting to remind her: "It's today—you're going today—this afternoon. Here she is!"

*(Second Version)*

That afternoon they were allowed to cut jugs and basins out of a draper's catalogue, and at tea-time they had real tea in the doll's tea set on the table. This was a very nice treat, indeed, except that the doll's tea-pot wouldn't pour out even after you'd poked a pin down the spout and blown into it.

But the next afternoon, which was Saturday, Father came home in high feather. The front door banged so hard that the whole house shook, and he shouted to Mother from the hall.

"Oh, how more than good of you, darling!" cried Mother, "but how unnecessary too. Of course, they'll simply love it. But to have spent all that money! You shouldn't have done it, Daddy dear! They've totally forgotten all about it. And what is this! Haifa-crown?" cried Mother. "No! Two shillings, I see," she corrected quickly, "to spend as well. Children! Children! Come down, downstairs!"

Down they came, Phyllis and Sylvia leading, Susannah holding on. "Do you know what Father's done?" And Mother held up her hand. What was she holding? Three cherry tickets and a green one. "He's bought you tickets. You're to go to the circus, this very afternoon, all of you, with Miss Wade. What do you say to that?"

"Oh, Mummy! Lovely! Lovely!" cried Phyllis and Sylvia.

"Isn't it?" said Mother. "Run upstairs. Run and ask Miss Wade to get you ready. Don't dawdle. Up you go! All of you."

Away flew Phyllis and Sylvia, but still Susannah stayed where she was at the bottom of the stairs, hanging her head.

"Go along," said Mother. And Father said sharply, "What the devil's the matter with the child?"

Susannah's face quivered. "I don't want to go," she whispered.

"What! Don't want to go to the Exhibition! After Father's— You naughty, ungrateful child! Either you go to the Exhibition, Susannah, or you will be packed off to bed at once."

Susannah's head bent low, lower still. All her little body bent forward. She looked as though she was going to bow down, to bow down to the ground, before her kind generous Father and beg for his forgiveness. . . .

