

## THE CANARY BY KATHERINE MANSFIELD

In this short story a woman who lives alone describes the canary she kept as a pet and tells us why it was very important for her.

- 1 Read the text and answer the question: why do you think the narrator has a bird as a pet and not a dog or a cat?

Have you kept birds? If you haven't, all this must sound, perhaps, exaggerated. People have the idea that birds are heartless, cold little creatures, not like dogs or cats. My washerwoman used to say on Mondays when she wondered why I didn't keep 'a nice fox terrier'. 'There's no comfort, Miss, in a canary.' Untrue. Dreadfully untrue. I remember one night. I had had a very awful dream – dreams can be dreadfully cruel – even after I had woken up I could not get over it. So I put on my dressing-gown and went down to the kitchen for a glass of water. It was a winter night and raining hard. I suppose I was still half asleep, but through the kitchen window, that hadn't a blind, it seemed to me the dark was staring in, spying. And suddenly I felt it was unbearable that I had no one to whom I could say, 'I've had such a dreadful dream,' or – or, 'Hide me from the dark.' I even covered my face for a minute. And then there came a little 'Sweet! Sweet!' His cage was on the table, and the cloth had slipped so that a little light shone through. 'Sweet! Sweet!' said the darling little fellow again, softly, as much as to say, 'I'm here, Missus! I'm here!' That was so beautifully comforting that I nearly cried. . . . And now he's gone. I shall never have another bird, another pet of any kind. How could I?



### GLOSSARY

**fox terrier** – a type of dog  
**dreadfully** – very; extremely  
**dressing-gown** – a long coat worn indoors, usually over pyjamas  
**a blind** – a cover for a window

- 2 Why is the woman scared?
- 3 Why does the narrator cover her face for a minute? Is this gesture important?
- 4 How does the canary help the narrator feel better?
- 5 Which words or phrases tell us she thinks of the canary as a person and not an animal?
- 6 **SPEAKING** Work in pairs. Do you believe the narrator when she says she will never get another pet? How important are pets for people who live alone?