

ФЕДЕРАЛЬНОЕ АГЕНТСТВО ПО ОБРАЗОВАНИЮ  
ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЕ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНОЕ УЧРЕЖДЕНИЕ  
ВЫСШЕГО ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ  
«САМАРСКИЙ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЙ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ»

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**СТИЛИСТИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ ТЕКСТОВ  
ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННЫХ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЙ**

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В хрестоматии собраны оригинальные прозаические тексты, созданные в Великобритании, США, Австралии и Ирландии. В хрестоматию включены произведения современных мастеров слова. Каждый автор представлен в пособии наиболее популярным рассказом.

Подборка текстов поможет студентам по достоинству оценить литературный стиль включённых в хрестоматию авторов. Каждый из представленных текстов может быть использован как для анализа и обсуждения в аудитории, так и для домашней самостоятельной работы.

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## Contents

1. W.S .Maugham. Mr. Know All.....	6
2. Alfred Coppard. The Cherry Tree.....	11
3. Alan Marshall. The Singing of the Sun.....	15
4. John Cheever. Reunion.....	22
5. Roald Dahl. The Butler.....	25
6. Katherine Mansfield. Her First Ball .....	28
7. William Saroyan. The Filipino and the Drunkard.....	33
8. John Galsworthy. The Broken Boot. ....	36
9. O. Henry. The Cop and the Anthem.....	40
10. John Sommerfield. Dying isn't Easy.....	45
11. David Herbert Lawrence. Mercury.....	51
12. Ray Bradbury. The End of the Beginning.....	55
13. Stephen Crane. The Angel Child.....	59
14. James Thurber. The Secret Life of Walter Mitty.....	66
15. Edgar Poe. The Tell- Tale Heart.....	71
16. Dorothy Parker. The Last Tea.....	75
17. Stan Barstow. The Search for Tommy Flynn.....	78

## **Text Analysis**

### **A Guide to Analysis**

#### **Stage I**

The author, his lifetime, the trend he belongs to, his creative activity, his epoch and the problems raised in his works, the peculiarities of his style.

#### **Stage II**

The type of the text under analysis. If the text is one that belongs to the belles-lettres style, it is necessary to point out what kind of text it is (a story, a poem, a chapter from the novel etc.).

A story is a short narrative in prose. It usually contains one event focused on a single aspect of life. As a rule the number of personages is limited. It has some social or psychological significance.

A story or a novel may belong to one of the following types/genres:

- 1) social which studies the effect of social conditions at a given time and place upon human life and conduct;
- 2) psychological which is concerned mainly with the mental and emotional lives of characters;
- 3) historical in which the events and characters are drawn from the past;
- 4) detective in which a specific problem (usually murder) is solved;
- 5) science - fiction which deals with advances in science and technology and their influence on human beings. Sometimes the background is quite fantastic;
- 6) a documentary story reproduces real events as close as possible. Its main task is to involve the reader in some vital problem of the moment;
- 7) an entertaining story that aims at amusing the reader.

#### **Stage III**

Content-grasping/summary: the time of action, the place of action, the main characters, the events that take place in the text.

#### **Stage IV**

The theme and the idea of the text. As a rule, the theme lies on the surface: family relations, the problem of upbringing children, hardships of life etc.

The idea is deeper, it's the author's message to the reader against some vices of society, a protest against wars and violence etc. Very often the idea may be closely connected with the title of the text.

The general tone of the text. It may be ironical, sarcastic, humorous, dramatic, lyrical, nostalgic, reserved, trustful, elevated, tense, formal or casual, confident or humble, serious or light-hearted, restrained or moving etc.

### **Stage V**

The composition and structure of the text. The interrelation between different components of a literary work is called composition. It is never homogenous. Any work of fiction consists of relatively independent elements – narration, description, dialogue, interior monologue, dramatic monologue, the author's digression, insertions from other styles (it may be a piece of poetry, an advertisement, a newspaper clipping, scientific citation, a letter) etc.

Narration is dynamic, it gives a continuous account of events while description is static. It is a verbal portraiture of an object, a person, his appearance, a scene, an atmosphere etc. It may be detailed and direct or impressionistic, giving very few but striking details. Through the dialogue the characters are better portrayed. It also brings the action nearer to the reader. Dialogue seems to be more swift and more intense. Peculiarities of the character's speech are revealed through the dialogue. That's what we call direct speech -characterization.

The text may be built on contrast or similarity of characters. The plot may be closed (when all the elements: the beginning, the development of events, the highest point and the ending are clearly seen) and open (when one of the mentioned above elements is omitted). Try to find some analogy and contrast in the text; recurrent elements; interesting details, chosen by the author.

### **Stage VI**

Semantic analysis of the vocabulary used by the author. It is predetermined by the problems raised in the text, by the social status of his characters, their occupation, their level of education, by their relations with other characters etc.

### **Stage VII**

Stylistic analysis proper. It reveals the deeper information of the character's behaviour, his reflections on some events, his inner world, his aspirations for the better life. This part of the analysis aims at finding out additional information contained in the whole of the text. The student should point out what stylistic devices used by the author helped him to convey to the reader his message that he had in mind while writing this work of art.

### **Stage VIII**

The general impression of the text under analysis. The importance of the problems raised in the story or novel, novelty in its solution, the originality of the author's skill, the effect produced on the reader.

## MR KNOW – ALL

*By W. Somerset Maugham*

I was prepared to dislike Max Kelada even before I knew him. The war has just finished and the passenger traffic in the ocean-going liners was heavy. Accommodation was very hard to get and you had to put up with whatever the agents chose to offer you. You could not hope for a cabin to yourself and I was thankful to be given one in which there were only two berths. But when I was told the name of my companion my heart sank. It suggested closed portholes and the night air rigidly excluded. It was bad enough to share a cabin for fourteen days with anyone (I was going from San Francisco to Yokohama), but I should have looked upon it with less dismay if my fellow passenger's name had been Smith or Brown.

When I went on board I found Mr Kelada's luggage already below, I did not like the look of it; there were too many labels on the suit-cases, and the wardrobe trunk was too big. He had unpacked his toilet things, and I observed that he was a patron of an excellent Monsieur Coty<sup>1</sup>; for I saw on the washing-stand his scent, his hair-wash and his brilliantine. Mr Kelada's brushes, ebony with his monogram in gold, would have been all the better for a scrub. I did not at all like Mr Kelada. I made my way into the smoking-room. I called for a pack of cards and began to play patience. I had scarcely started before a man came up to me and asked me if he was right in thinking my name was so and so.

"I am Mr Kelada," he added, with a smile that showed a row of flashing teeth, and sat down.

"Oh, yes, we're sharing a cabin, I think."

"Bit of luck, I call it. You never know who you're going to be put in with. I was jolly glad when I heard you were English. I'm all for us English sticking together when we're abroad, if you understand what I mean."

I blinked.

"Are you English?" I asked perhaps tactlessly.

"Rather. You don't think I look like an American, do you? British to the backbone, that's what I am."

To prove it, Mr Kelada took out of his pocket a passport and airily waved it under my nose.

King George<sup>2</sup> has many strange subjects. Mr Kelada was very short and of a steady build, clean-shaven and dark-skinned, with a fleshy hooked nose and very large, lustrous and liquid eyes. His long black hair was sleek and curly. He spoke with a fluency in which there was nothing English and his gestures were exuberant. I felt pretty sure that a closer inspection of that British passport

<sup>1</sup> He used the scent of Coty, the famous French firm

<sup>2</sup> King George V (1910-1936)

would have betrayed the fact that Mr Kelada was born under a blue sky that is generally seen in England.

“What will you have?” he asked me.

I looked at him doubtfully. Prohibition<sup>1</sup> was in force and to all appearance the ship was bone-dry. When I am not thirsty I do not know which I dislike more, ginger ale or lemon squash. But Mr Kelada flashed an oriental smile at me.

“Whisky and soda or a dry martini, you have only to say a word.”

From each of his pockets he fished a flask and laid it on the table before me. I chose the martini, and calling the steward he ordered a tumbler of ice and a couple of glasses.

“A very good cocktail,” I said.

“Well, there are plenty more where that came from, and if you’ve got any friends on board, you tell them you’ve got a pal who’s got all the liquor in the world.”

Mr Kelada was chatty. He talked of New York and San Francisco. He discussed plays, pictures and politics. He was patriotic. The Union Jack<sup>2</sup> is an impressive piece of drapery, but, when it is flourished by a gentleman from Alexandria or Beirut, I cannot but feel that it loses somewhat in dignity. Mr Kelada was familiar. I do not wish to put on airs, but I cannot help feeling that it is seemly in a total stranger to put “mister” before my name when he addresses me. Mr. Kelada, doubtless to set me at my ease, used no such formality. I did not like Mr. Kelada. I had put aside the cards when he sat down, but now, thinking that for this first occasion our conversation had lasted long enough, I went on with my game.

“The three on the four,” said Mr. Kelada.

There is nothing more exasperating when you are playing patience than to be told where to put the card you have turned up before you have had a chance to look for yourself.

“It’s coming out, it’s coming out,” he cried. “The ten on the knave.”

With rage and hatred in my heart I finished.

Then he seized the pack.

“Do you like card tricks?”

“No, I hate card tricks,” I answered.

“Well, I’ll just show you this one.”

He showed me three. Then I said I would go down to the dining-room and get my seat at table.

“Oh, that’s all right,” he said. I’ve already taken a seat for you. I thought that as we were in the same state-room we might just as well sit at the same table.

I did not like Mr. Kelada.

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<sup>1</sup> Prohibition «Сухой закон»

<sup>2</sup> The Union Jack: the British flag

I not only shared a cabin with him and ate three meals a day at the same table, but I could not walk round the deck without his joining me. It was impossible to snub him. It never occurred to him that he was not wanted. He was certain that you were as glad to see him as he was to see you. In your own house you might have kicked him downstairs and slammed the door in his face without the suspicion dawning on him that he was not a welcome visitor. He was a good mixer, and in three days knew everyone on board. He ran everything. He managed the sweeps<sup>1</sup>, conducted the auctions, collected money for prizes at the sports, got up quoit and golf matches, organized the concert and arranged the fancy-dress ball. He was everywhere and always. He was certainly the best hated man in the ship. We called him Mr. Know-All, even to his face. He took it as a compliment. But it was at mealtimes that he was most intolerable. For the better part of an hour then he had us at his mercy. He was hearty, jovial, loquacious and argumentative. He knew everything better than anybody else, and it was an affront to his overweening vanity that you should disagree with him. He would not drop a subject, however unimportant, till he had brought you round to his way of thinking. The possibility that he could be mistaken never occurred to him. He was the chap who knew. We sat at the doctor's table. Mr. Kelada would certainly have had it all his own way, for the doctor was lazy and I was frigidly indifferent, except for a man called Ramsay who sat there also. He was as dogmatic as Mr. Kelada and resented bitterly the Levantine's<sup>2</sup> cocksureness. The discussions they had were acrimonious and interminable.

Ramsay was in the American Consular Service and was stationed at Kobe. He was a great heavy fellow from the Middle West, with loose fat under a tight skin, and he bulged out of his ready-made clothes. He was on his way back to resume his post, having been on a flying visit to New York to fetch his wife who had been spending a year at home. Mrs. Ramsay was a very pretty little thing, with pleasant manners and a sense of humour. The Consular service is ill-paid, and she was dressed always very simply; but she knew how to wear her clothes. She achieved an effect of quiet distinction. I should not paid any particular attention to her but that she possessed a quality that may be common enough in women, but nowadays is not obvious in their demeanour. You could not look at her without being struck by her modesty. It shone in her like a flower on a coat.

One evening at dinner the conversation by chance drifted to the subject of pearls. There had been in the papers a good deal of talk about the culture pearls which the cunning Japanese were making, and the doctor remarked that they must inevitably diminish the value of real ones. They were very good already; they would soon be perfect. Mr. Kelada, as was his habit, rushed the new topic. He told us all that was to be known about pearls. I do not believe Ramsay knew anything about them at all, but he could not resist the opportunity to have a fling at Levantine, and in five minutes we were in the middle of a heated argument. I

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<sup>1</sup> He managed/organized lotteries

<sup>2</sup> Levantine: an inhabitant of the Lebanon



had seen Mr. Kelada vehement and voluble before, but never so voluble and vehement as now. At last something that Ramsay said stung him, for he thumped the table and shouted:

“Well, I ought to know what I am talking about. I am going to Japan just to look into this Japanese pearl business. I am in the trade and there's not a man in it who won't tell you that what I say about pearls goes. I know all the best pearls in the world, and what I don't know about pearls isn't worth knowing.”

Here was news for us, for Mr. Kelada, with all his loquacity, had never told anyone what his business was. We only knew vaguely that he was going to Japan on some commercial errand. He looked round the table triumphantly.

“They'll never be able to get a culture pearl that an expert like me can't tell with half an eye.” He pointed to a chain that Mrs. Ramsay wore. “You take my word for it, Mrs. Ramsay, that chain you are wearing will never be worth a cent less than it is now.”

Mrs. Ramsay in her modest way flushed a little and slipped the chain inside her dress. Ramsay leaned forward. He gave us all a look and a smile flickered in his eyes.

“That's a pretty chain of Mrs Ramsay's, isn't it?”

“I noticed it at once,” answered Mr. Kelada. “Gee, I said to myself, those are pearls all right.”

“I didn't buy it myself, of course, I'd be interested to know how much you think it cost.”

“Oh, in the trade somewhere round fifteen thousand dollars. But if it was bought on Fifth Avenue I shouldn't be surprised to hear that anything up to thirty thousand was paid for it.”

Ramsay smiled grimly.

“You'll be surprised to hear that Mrs. Ramsay bought that string at a department store the day before we left New York, for eighteen dollars.”

Mr. Kelada flushed.

“Rot. It's not only real, but it's as fine a string for its size as I've ever seen.”

“Will you bet on it? I'll bet you a hundred dollars it's imitation.”

“Done.”<sup>1</sup>

“Oh, Elmer, you can't bet on a certainty, said Mrs. Ramsay.

She had a little smile on her lips and her tone was gently deprecating.

“Can't I? If I get a chance of easy money like that I should be all sorts of a fool not to take it.”

“But how can it be proved?” she continued. “It's only my word against Mr. Kelada's.”

“Let me look at the chain, and if it's imitation I'll tell you quickly enough. I can afford to lose a hundred dollars, said Mr. Kelada.

“Take it off, dear. Let the gentleman look at it as much as he wants.”

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<sup>1</sup> Done-Agreed

Mrs. Ramsay hesitated a moment. She put her hands to the clasp.

"I can't undo it," she said. "Mr. Kelada will just to have to take my word for it."

I had a sudden suspicion that something unfortunate was about to occur, but I could think of nothing to say.

Ramsay jumped up.

"I'll undo it."

He handed the chain to Mr. Kelada. The Levantine took a magnifying glass from his pocket and closely examined it. A smile of triumph spread over his smooth and swarthy face. He handed back the chain. He was about to speak. Suddenly he caught sight of Mrs. Ramsay's face. It was so white that she looked as though she were about to faint. She was staring at him with wide and terrified eyes. They held a desperate appeal; it was so clear that I wondered why her husband did not see it.

Mr. Kelada stopped with his mouth open. He flushed deeply. You could almost see the effort he was making over himself.

"I was mistaken," he said. "It's a very good imitation, but of course as soon as I looked through my glass I saw that it wasn't real. I think eighteen dollars is just about as much as the damned thing's worth."

He took out his pocketbook and from it a hundred-dollar bill. He handed it to Ramsay without a word.

"Perhaps that'll teach you not to be so cocksure another time, my young friend," said Ramsay as he took the note.

I noticed that Mr. Kelada's hands were trembling.

The story spread over the ship as stories do, and he had to put up with a good deal of chaff that evening. It was a fine joke that Mr. Know-All had been caught out. But Mrs. Ramsay retired to her state-room with a headache.

Next morning I got up and began to shave. Mr. Kelada lay on his bed smoking a cigarette. Suddenly there was a scraping sound and I saw a letter pushed under the door. I opened the door and looked out. There was nobody there. I picked up the letter and saw that it was addressed to Max Kelada. The name was written in block letters. I handed it to him.

"Who's this from?" He opened it. "Oh!"

He took out of the envelope, not a letter, but a hundred-dollar bill. He looked at me and reddened. He tore the envelope into little bits and gave them to me.

"Do you mind just throwing them out of the porthole?"

I did as he asked, and then looked at him with a smile.

"No one likes being made to look a perfect damned fool," he said.

"Were the pearls real?"

"If I had a pretty little wife I shouldn't let her spend a year in New York while I stayed at Kobe," said he.

At that moment I did not entirely dislike Mr. Kelada. He reached out for his pocketbook and carefully put in it the hundred-dollar bill.

### **Questions on comprehension:**

1. *What details indicate the time of action?*
2. *What do you know about the Prohibition Law in the USA? Was it always observed? Give your proofs from the text.*
3. *Why does the story-teller dislike Mr. Kelada at first sight? Was it due to his snobbism?*
4. *How do you think Mrs. Ramsay has got her string of pearls?*
5. *Do you think of Mr. Kelada as of a noble gentleman? Why?*
6. *Has the narrator changed his attitude to Mr. Kelada completely?*

### **Questions for discussion:**

1. *Why was the story-teller so dismayed at the thought of sharing a cabin with Mr. Kelada?*
2. *Why was Mr. Kelada the best hated man on board the ship?*
3. *What role did Mr. Kelada play in averting a scandal?*
4. *What motives was Mr. Kelada guided by in behaving as he did?*
5. *What brought about a change in the narrator's attitude to Mr. Kelada?*
6. *Describe Mr. Kelada's appearance and the traits of his character as revealed in the story.*

## **CHERRY TREE**

*By Alfred Coppard*

There was uproar somewhere among the backyards of Australia Street. It was so alarming that people at their midday meal sat still and stared at one another. A fortnight before murder had been done in the street, in broad daylight, with a chopper; people were nervous. An upper window was thrown open and a startled and startling head exposed.

"It's that young devil, Johnny Flynn, again! Killing rats!" shouted Mrs. Knatchbole. She ugly: she had a goitred neck and a sharp skinny nose with an orb shining at its end, constant as grief.

"You wait, my boy, till your mother comes home, you just wait!" invited that apparition, but Johnny was gazing sickly at the body of a big rat slaughtered by the dogs of his friend George. The uproar was caused by the quarrelling of the dogs, possibly for honours, but more probably, as is the custom of victors, for loot.

"Bob down!" warned George, but Johnny bobbed up to catch the full anger of those baleful Knatchbole eyes. The urchin put his fingers promptly to his nose.

“Look at that for eight years old,” screamed the lady. “Eight years old ‘e is! As true as God’s my maker I’ll ...”

The impending vow was stayed and blasted forever, Mrs. Knatchbole being taken with a fit of sneezing, whereupon the boys uttered some derisive “Haw haws!”

So Mrs. Knatchbole met Mrs. Flynn that night as she came from work, Mrs. Flynn being a widow who toiled daily and dreadfully at a laundry and perforce left her children, except for their school hours, to their own devices. The encounter was an emphatic one and the tired widow promised to admonish her boy.

“But it’s all right Mrs. Knatchbole, he is going from me for a week, to his uncle in London he is going, a person of wealth, and he’ll be no annoyance to ye then. I am ashamed that he misbehaves but he’s no bad boy really.”

At home his mother’s remonstrances reduced Johnny to repentance and silence; he felt base indeed; he wanted to do something great and worthy at once to offset it all; he wished he had got some money, he’d have gone and bought her a bottle of stout - he knew she liked stout.

“Why do you vex people so, Johnny?” asked Mrs. Flynn wearily. “I work my fingers to the bone for ye, week in and week out. Why can’t ye behave like Pomony?”

His sister was a year younger than him; her name was Mona, which Johnny’s elegant mind had disliked. One day he re-baptised her; Pomona she became and Pomona she remained. The Flynns sat down to supper. “Never mind about all that, mum,” said the boy, kissing her as he passed her chair, “talk to us about the cherry tree!” The cherry tree, luxuriantly blooming, was the crown of the mother’s memories of her youth and her father’s farm; around the myth of its wonderful blossoms and fruit she could weave garlands of romance, and to her own mind, as well as to the minds of her children, it became a heavenly symbol of her old lost home, grand with acres and delightful with orchard and full pantry. What wonder that in her humorous narration the joys were multiplied and magnified until even Johnny was obliged to intervene. “Look here, how many horses did your father have, mum ... really though?” Mrs. Flynn became vague, cast a furtive glance at this son of hers and then gulped with laughter until she recovered her ground with: “Ah, but there was a cherry tree!” It was a grand supper—actually a polony and some potatoes. Johnny knew this was because he was going away. Ever since it was known that he was to go to London they had been having something special like this, or sheep’s trotters, or pig’s tail. Mother seemed to grow kinder and kinder to him. He wished he had some money, he would like to buy her a bottle of stout – he knew she liked stout.

Well Johnny went away to live with his uncle, but, alas, he was only two months in London before he was returned to his mother and Pomony. Uncle was an engine-driver who disclosed to his astounded nephew a passion for

gardening. This was incomprehensible to Johnny Flynn. A great roaring boiling locomotive was the grandest thing in the world. Johnny had rides on it, so he knew. And it was easy for him to imagine that every gardener cherished in the darkness of his disappointed soul an unavailing passion for a steam engine, but how an engine – driver could immerse himself in the mushiness of gardening was a baffling problem. However, before he returned home he discovered one important thing from his uncle’s hobby, and he sent the information to his sister:

Dear Pomona,

Uncle Harry has got a alotment and grow veggutables. He says what makes the mold is worms. You know we puled all the worms out off our garden and chukked them over Miss Natchbols wall. Well you better get some more quick a lot ask George to help you and I bring som seeds home when I comes next week by the excursion on Moms birthday

Your sincerely brother.  
John Flynn

On mother’s birthday Pomona met him at the station. She kissed him shyly and explained that mother was going to have a half holiday to celebrate the double occasion and would be home with them at dinner time.

“Pomona, did you get them worms?”

Pomona was inclined to evade the topic of worms for the garden, but fortunately her brother’s enthusiasm for another gardening project tempered the wind of his indignation. When they reached home he unwrapped two parcels he had brought with him; he explained his scheme to his sister; he led her into the garden. The Flynn’s backyard, mostly paved with bricks, was small, and so the enclosing walls, truculently capped by chips of glass, although too low for privacy were yet too high for the growth of any cherishable plant. Johnny had certainly once reared a magnificent exhibit of two cowslips, but these had been mysteriously destroyed by the Knatchbole cat. The dank little enclosure was charged with sterility; nothing flourished there except a lot of beetles and a dauntless evergreen bush, as tall as Johnny, displaying a profusion of thick shiny leaves that you could split on your tongue and make squeakers with. Pomona showed him how to do this and they then busied themselves in the garden until the dinner siren warned them that mother would be coming home.

They hurried into the kitchen and Pomona quickly spread the cloth and the plates of food upon the table, while Johnny conspicuously in the centre, after laboriously extracting the stopper with a fork and hair-pin, a bottle of stout brought from London. He had been much impressed by numberless advertisements upon the hoardings respecting this attractive beverage. The children then ran off to meet their mother and they all came home together with great hilarity. Mrs. Flynn’s attention having been immediately drawn to the

sinister decoration of her dining table, Pomona was requested to pour out a glass of the nectar. Johnny handed this gravely to his parent saying:

“Many happy returns of the day, Mrs. Flynn!”

“O dear, dear!” gasped his mother merrily, “you drink first!”

“Excuse me, no, Mrs. Flynn,” rejoined her son, “many happy returns of the day!”

When the toast had been honoured Pomona and Johnny looked tremendously at each other.

“Shall we?” exclaimed Pomona. “Oh, yes,” decided Johnny; “Come on mum, in the garden, something marvellous!”

She followed her children into that dull little den, and by happy chance the sun shone grandly for the occasion. Behold, the dauntless evergreen bush had been stripped of its leaves and upon its blossomless twigs the children had hung numerous couples of ripe cherries, white and red and black.

“What do you think of it, mum?” they cried, snatching some of the fruit and pressing it into her hands, “what do you think of it?”

“Beautiful! Replied Mrs. Flynn in a tremulous voice. The children stared silently at their mother until she could bear it no longer. She turned and went sobbing into the kitchen.

### ***Questions on comprehension:***

- 1. Was Johnny's behaviour typical of a boy of his age? Describe it.*
- 2. Why couldn't Mother pay much attention to her children?*
- 3. Was Johnny sorry about his misbehavior in the yard?*
- 4. What did he imagine himself to be at home?*
- 5. What was the reason for sending Johnny to his uncle in London?*
- 6. How did the children decide to celebrate their mother's birthday?*

### ***Questions for discussion:***

- 1. Why did the children like to listen to their mother's story about the cherry-tree?*
- 2. What were the relations between Mother and her children?*
- 3. Did Johnny feel responsibility for the whole family?*
- 4. Was the idea of celebrating Mother's birthday like that a success?*
- 5. Do you think that Mother could be proud of her children?*
- 6. How can you account for the title of the story?*

## THE SINGING OF THE SUN

*By Alan Marshall (1902-1980) Australia*

“That’s a duck, isn’t it?”

“Where?”

“It just landed on the water. Wait a minute. Now you can see it. Look, near the clump of rushes.”

The man lying on the ground raised himself on his elbow. His dressing-gown was open. Beads of water glittering on his naked chest.

His hair was wet. An A.I.F.\* uniform lay folded beside him.

The youth was standing erect a few yards away from the man. He was wearing a pair of bathing trunks. His body was brown from the sun.

The swamp water threaded the thin grass almost to the feet. Broken stems of rushes were dark against the glitter. Farther out, between the clumps of lignum, the water became deeper. Behind these, stooped red gums, caught by the flood, trailed their leaves on water.

“Is there one or two?” asked the man searching the swamp.

“Two, I think. There are always two, aren’t there?”

“Usually, I can’t see them. Where did you say?”

“Straight across there.” The youth pointed. “Now can you see?”

“Yes, so it is.”

“Is it a duck?”

“It’s a duck all right.”

“Doesn’t it look small?”

“They always do when they are swimming. Part of its body is submerged, you see. I can’t see the other one.”

“There must be only one. I thought there were two. Will we go back and get the gun?”

The youth was excited. There was an appeal in the question.

“Well – er – yes. We could do that,” said the man slowly.

He watched the duck with increasing eagerness.

“Doesn’t it seem interested in things? See how it turns its head. It looks at everything. It does seem a little duck,” he added with wonder.

“Will we get the gun?” The youth was becoming impatient.

“When we get back to town I want to tell them that I shot a duck.”

“Let’s watch it a minute,” pleaded the man. “I can’t get over how happy it seems. It’s like a man arriving home on leave. Did you see it land?”

“Yes. It flew there. I saw it skid along the water. Will we go now?”

“Strange, it being alone,” murmured the man. “I can’t understand it being so happy when it is alone like that. Look, it’s coming towards us! Gosh, that’s funny! Isn’t it tame?”

“Hurry up. Let’s go back and get the gun.”

“All right,” said the man resignedly. “You go and get it. I’ll watch the duck.”

The youth slipped on a pair of sand-shoes.

“Don’t frighten it, will you?” he said anxiously.

He moved quietly away, treading gently between the dry twigs that littered the ground beneath the river gums. The station homestead was on the crest of a hill overlooking the swamp. He began to run.

The duck flicked its tail and sailed among the swamp grass. It moved into the clear water between the lignum searching with quick movements of the head. It suddenly ruffled its feathers and trod water while it flapped its wings. It sank back contentedly and continued its eager voyaging.

The man had risen to his feet. His expression was rapt, yet some distant sadness had come to him and his lips were trembling. He watched the little duck with an intensity born of some vital need.

He wanted to hold it closely in his hands, to feel the warm beat of its heart; to sense the flow of life, the power that lifted it higher than a cloud...

He had an urgency to cling to that which it held like a treasure – the something that was being torn from him.

It had the unknowing life, the untainted life, the life of smooth, windless pools encircled by lignum where there was no sound save that from peaceful things; where the pure sky had never screamed with terror, nor the sun glinted from steel.

It could see and hear and it was not afraid of what it saw and heard. It could lit itself into the singing of the sun... Above steaming jungles...

He clenched his hands.

*Jim was beside him that night when the Japs came to New Britain\*... the chattering over the dark water... the green flare... the landing.*

*“Let’em have it.”*

*The screams... the shouting...*

*“Sock it into ’em.”*

*Raluana beach and their machine guns sweeping the wire like rain... and Jim muttering, hell, hell, hell...The dawn... the blood... the killing... The red browed waves tired with the weight of dead\* ... The rising and falling bodies – lifted gently, tossed contemptuously ... Barge after barge on rollers of flesh ...*

*The Japs were tangled in the wire. They raked them: they mowed them like wheat. And still they came – the living clambering over the dead; the dead piling into barricades behind which the vomiting barges ploughed into the sand.*

*The salt was in his mouth... the dry pounding of his heart... Then the grunt and the doubling up...*

*And Jim: “Where’d it get you? Hang on. Jesus!”*

*“It’s not bad. I’m all right.”*

*The staggering, crumpling Japs bridging the wire with their dead.*

*They climbed on them; they trod them down. They came on like locusts in a plague. :)*



*Then the final burst... and the jungle... and the long struggle home...  
Oh! the killing! the killing! the killing!*

He turned and saw the youth running towards him with the gun. He looked again at the duck.

It glided through the open water shattering the silver into sparkles of light.

He lifted a stick from the ground and hurled it so that it fell with a splash beside the bird.

The duck rose, trailing two furrows with its feet as it skimmed the water. It flew high and circled, banking against the wind so that for a moment he saw the full stretch of its wings on each side of its brown body.

Far out over the water it landed again.

"Well, that's done it," panted the youth disgustedly. "We'll never get it now."

The man reached for his uniform.

"No, we'll never get it now," he said.

## EXPLANATORY NOTES

Alan Marshall (1902-1980?) an Australian writer. His creative activity as a writer started in the 20s-30s. He is famous as a short-story writer of common Australian people. He follows realistic traditions. His collections of short stories are: 'How's Andy Going?' (1956), 'People of the Dream Time' (1952), 'Tell Us about the Turkey, Jo' and others. He wrote a lot for children. Alan Marshall published his autobiographical trilogy: 'I Can Jump Puddles' (1956), 'This Is the Grass' (1962), 'In My Own Heart' (1963).

\*A.I.F. – Australian Imperial Forces

\*New Britain – Новая Британия, самый крупный остров в архипелаге Бисмарка около Новой Гвинеи; после 1914 г. находился под контролем Австралии. В 1942 г. японцы напали на Новую Британию и Новую Гвинею и после ожесточенных боев захватили эти острова.

\*Sock it into 'em! - Зададим им жару!

### *Questions for comprehension:*

- 1. In what respect do these two men differ?*
- 2. Why is the soldier indifferent to the suggestion of hunting a duck at first?*
- 3. What is the similarity/ analogy between the duck and the soldier?*
- 4. What is known from the past life of the soldier?*
- 5. Why does the soldier frighten the bird and let it fly away?*

### *Questions for discussion:*

1. How can you account for the title of the story?
2. Why is the duck alone?
3. What feelings overwhelm the soldier while watching the duck?
4. Does the duck help him to revive to life? Prove it by the choice of stylistic devices used by the author.
5. What is the author's skill in describing the horrors of war?
6. What meaning is implied in the final sentence?

### **TESTS**

1. Alan Marshall belongs to ...
  - a) realism
  - b) modernism
  - c) realism with elements of stream of consciousness
  - d) expressionism

*Правильный ответ: realism with elements of stream of consciousness*

2. The theme of the story is ...
  - a) the beauty of Australian scenery
  - b) the cruelties of war
  - c) the monotony of peaceful life
  - d) every living being must enjoy life to the full

*Правильный ответ: every living being must enjoy life to the full*

3. The author's message is ...
  - a) his strong protest against wars
  - b) his revolt against any killings
  - c) while there is life there is hope
  - d) life is great if you don't weaken

*Правильный ответ: his revolt against any killings*

4. The title of the story is ...
  - a) symbolical
  - b) highly emotional
  - c) metaphorical
  - d) matter-of-fact

*Правильный ответ: metaphorical*

5. The place of action is ...
- a) Australia
  - b) Japan
  - c) The USA
  - d) Europe

*Правильный ответ: Australia*

6. The time of action is ...
- a) World War I
  - b) pre-war time before World War I
  - c) World War II
  - d) post-war time after World War II

*Правильный ответ: World War II*

7. The compositional pattern of the story is ...
- a) a third-person simultaneous narration
  - b) a third person retrospective narration
  - c) a first person entrusted narration
  - d) a third person narration interrupted by dialogues and a flash-back

*Правильный ответ: a third person narration interrupted by dialogues and a flash-back*

8. The plot of the story is characterized as ...
- a) a closed – plot structure
  - b) an open – plot structure
  - c) a mixed type plot
  - d) a psychological plot

*Правильный ответ: a closed – plot structure*

9. The author resorts to ...
- a) direct speech characterization
  - b) indirect speech characterization
  - c) the combination of both direct and indirect
  - d) digressions

*Правильный ответ: the combination of both direct and indirect*

10. The main principle of the text construction is ...
- a) the principle of analogy and contrast

- b) the principle of recurrence
- c) the principle of incomplete representation
- d) the principle of iceberg

*Правильный ответ: the principle of analogy and contrast*

11. The general plot of the story is ...

- a) dramatic
- b) lyrical
- c) sympathetic
- d) ironical

*Правильный ответ: dramatic, lyrical*

12. Describing the main character the author manages to find the analogy in

...

- a) simile
- b) metaphor
- c) harmony of nature
- d) the title of the story

*Правильный ответ: simile*

13. These words belong to different styles:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1) small            | <input type="checkbox"/> a) vulgar         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2) little           | <input type="checkbox"/> b) botanical term |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3) Japs             | <input type="checkbox"/> c) emotional      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4) red gums         | <input type="checkbox"/> d) neutral        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5) sock it into 'em | <input type="checkbox"/> e) colloquial     |

a) small

- vulgar
- botanical term
- emotional
- neutral
- colloquial

*Правильный ответ: neutral*

b) little

- vulgar
- botanical term
- emotional
- neutral
- colloquial

*Правильный ответ: emotional*

- c) Japs
- vulgar
  - botanical term
  - emotional
  - neutral
  - colloquial

*Правильный ответ: colloquial*

- d) red gums
- vulgar
  - botanical term
  - emotional
  - neutral
  - colloquial

*Правильный ответ: botanical term*

- e) sock it into 'em
- vulgar
  - botanical term
  - emotional
  - neutral
  - colloquial

*Правильный ответ: vulgar*

14. The duck was alone because ...
- a) it managed to survive after hunting
  - b) it wasn't aware of the danger
  - c) it was inexperienced and never got frightened
  - d) it was wounded

*Правильный ответ: it managed to survive after hunting*

15. Describing the war episode the author uses ...
- a) an entrusted narration
  - b) the technique "stream of consciousness"
  - c) a third person narration
  - d) a dialogue

*Правильный ответ: the technique "stream of consciousness"*

16. The stylistic devices used in the following sentences are ...

- a) "Raluana beach and their machine guns sweeping the wire like rain ..."
- 1) allusion
  - 2) simile
  - 3) comparison

*Правильный ответ: simile*

- b) "The Japs were tangled in the wire. They raked them, they mowed them like wheat."
- 1) climax
  - 2) alliteration
  - 3) inversion

*Правильный ответ: climax*

17. Describing the cruelties of war the author uses numerous stylistic devices. Make sure that you can match them properly.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1) metonymy               | <input type="checkbox"/> a) the red browed waves  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2) simile                 | <input type="checkbox"/> b) the rising and falling bodies                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3) epithet                | <input type="checkbox"/> c) they mowed them like wheat  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4) onomatopoeia           | <input type="checkbox"/> d) then the final burst... and the jungle ... and the long way home... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5) break-in-the-narrative | <input type="checkbox"/> e) ...and Jim muttering, hell, hell, hell                              |

*Правильные ответы: metonymy - the rising and falling bodies; simile - they mowed them like wheat; epithet - the red browed waves; onomatopoeia - ... and Jim muttering, hell, hell, hell. break-in-the-narrative - then the final burst... and the jungle ... and the long way home...*

## REUNION

**By Jonh Cheever (1912-1982)**

The last time I saw my father was in Grand Central Station<sup>1</sup>. I was going from my grandmother's to a cottage on the Cape that my mother had rented, and I wrote my father that I would be in New York between trains for an hour and a half, and asked if we could have lunch together. His secretary wrote to say that he

<sup>1</sup> Grand Central Station- the New York telephone exchange, Manhattan.

would meet me at the information booth at noon, and at twelve o'clock sharp I saw him coming through the crowd. He was a stranger to me—my mother divorced him three years ago and I hadn't been with him since— but as soon as I saw him I felt that he was my father, my flesh and blood, my future and my doom. I knew that when I was grown I would be something like him; I would have to plan my campaigns within his limitations. He was a big, good-looking man, and I was terribly happy to see him again. He struck me on the back and shook my hand. "Hi, Charlie," he said, "Hi, boy, I'd like to take you up to my club, but it's in the Sixties, and if you have to catch an early train I guess we'd better get something to eat around here." He put his arm around me, and I smelled my father the way my mother sniffs a rose. It was a rich compound of whiskey, after-shave lotion, shoe polish, woolens, and the rankness of a mature male.

I hoped that someone would see us together. I wished that we could be photographed. I wanted some record of our having been together.

We went out of the station and up the side street to a restaurant. It was still early, and the place was empty. The bartender was quarrelling with a delivery boy, and there was one very old waiter in a red coat down by the kitchen door. We sat down, and my father hailed the waiter in a loud voice: "Kelner" he shouted. "Garson, Cameriere! You!" His boisterousness in the empty restaurant seemed out of place. "Could we have a little service here! he shouted. "Chop-chop." Then he clapped his hands. This caught the waiter's attention and he shuffled over our table.

"Were you clapping your hands at me?" he asked.

"Come down, come down, sommelier<sup>2</sup> my father said. "If it isn't too much to ask you—if it wouldn't be too much above and beyond the call of duty, we would like a couple of Beefeater Gibsons."

"I don't like to be clapped at," the waiter said.

"I should have brought my whistle, my father said. "I have a whistle that is audible only to the ears of old waiters. Now, take out your little pad and your little pencil and see if you can get this straight: two Beefeater Gibsons. Repeat after me: two Beefeater Gibsons."

"I think you'd better go somewhere else," the waiter said quietly.

"That," said my father, "is one of the most brilliant suggestions I have ever heard. Come on Charlie, let's have the hell out of here."

I followed my father out of that restaurant into another. He was not so boisterous this time. Our drinks came, and he cross-questioned me about the baseball season. He then struck the edge of his empty glass with his knife and began shouting again, "*Garcon! Kellner! Cameriere!*<sup>3</sup> *You!* Could we trouble you to bring us two more of the same."

"How old is your boy?" the waiter asked.

"That," my father said, "is none of your Goddamned business.

"I'm sorry, sir," the waiter said, "but I won't serve the boy another drink."

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<sup>2</sup> sommelier – sleeper

<sup>3</sup> kellner (Germ.) – garcon (Fr.) – cameriere (It.) – waiter

“Well, I have some news for you,” my father said. “I have some very interesting news for you. This doesn’t happen to be the only restaurant in New York. They’ve opened another on the corner. Come on, Charlie.”

He paid the bill, and I followed him out of that restaurant into another. Here the waiters wore pink jackets, like hunting coats, and there was a lot of horse tack on the walls. We sat down, and my father began to shout again. “Master of the hounds! Tallyhoo and all that sort of thing. We’d like a little something in the way of a stirrup cup. Namely, two Bibson Geefeaters.”

“Two Bibson Geefeaters?” the waiter asked, smiling.

“You know damned well what I want,” my father said angrily. “I want two Beefeater Gibsons,<sup>1</sup> and make it snappy. Things have changed in jolly old England. So my friend the duke tells me. Let’s see what England can produce in the way of a cocktail.”

“This isn’t England,” the waiter said.

“Don’t argue with me,” my father said. “Just do as you are told.”

“I just thought you might like to know where you are,” the waiter said.

“If there is one thing I cannot tolerate,” my father said, “it is an impudent domestic. Come on, Charlie.”

The fourth place we went to was Italian. “*Buon giorno*,” my father said. “*Per favore, passiamo avere due cocktail americani, forti. Molto gin, poco vermut.*”

“I don’t understand Italian,” the waiter said.

“Oh, come off it, my father said. “You understand Italian, and you know damned well you do. *Vogliamo due cocktail americani. Subito.*”

The waiter left us and spoke with the captain, who came over to our table and said, “I am sorry, sir, but this table is reserved.”

“All right,” my father said. “Get us another table.”

“All the tables are reserved,” the captain said.

“I get it,” my father said. “You don’t desire our patronage. Is that it? Well, the hell with you. *Vada all’inferno.*<sup>2</sup> Let’s go, Charlie.”

“I have to get my train,” I said.

“I’m sorry, sonny,” my father said. “I’m terribly sorry.” He put his arm around me and pressed me against him. I’ll walk you back to the station. If there had only been time to go up to my club.”

“That’s all right, Daddy,” I said. “I’ll get you a paper,” he said. “I’ll get you a paper to read on the train.”

Then he went up to a newsstand and said, “Kind sir, will you be good enough to favor me with one of your God-damned, no-good, ten cent afternoon papers?” The clerk turned away from him and stared at a magazine cover. “Is it asking too much, kind sir,” my father said, “is it asking too much for you to sell me one of your disgusting specimens of yellow journalism?”

<sup>1</sup> Beefeater Gibson – cocktail of gin and dry vermouth, garnished with pearl onions.

<sup>2</sup> Vada all’inferno (It.) – Go to hell.



“I have to go , Daddy,” I said. “It’s late.”

“Now, just wait a second, sonny, he said. “Just wait a second I want to get a rise out of this chap.”

“Goodbye, Daddy,” I said, and I went down the stairs and got my train, and that was the last time I saw my father.

### ***Questions on comprehension and discussion:***

1. *Why has Cheever chosen the naive narrator?*

2. *Find the intermediate signals showing the stages of the change from his exuberant expectation to embarrassed disappointment.*

3. *Is any judgement passed on any of the characters? Explain the father’s behaviour.*

4. *Why are ‘fathers-sons’ relations so complex? How are they reflected in this story?*

5. *How can you account for the actual meaning of the title?*

## **THE BUTLER**

***By Roald Dahl***

As soon as George Cleaver had made his first million, he and Mrs. Cleaver moved out of their small suburban villa into an elegant London house. They acquired a French chef called Monsieur Estragon and an English called Tibbs, both wildly expensive. With the help of these two experts, the Cleavers set out to climb the social ladder and began to give dinner parties several times a week on a lavish scale.

But these dinners never seemed quite to come off. There was no animation, no spark to set the conversation alight, no style at all. Yet the food was superb and the service faultless.

“What the heck’s wrong with our parties, Tibbs?” Mr. Cleaver said to the butler. “Why don’t nobody never loosen up and let themselves go?”

Tibbs inclined his head to one side and looked at the ceiling. “I hope, sir, you will not be offended if I offer a small suggestion.”

“What is it?”

“It’s the wine, sir.”

“What about the wine?”

“Well, sir, Monsieur Estragon serves superb food. Superb food should be accompanied by superb wine. But you serve them a cheap and very odious Spanish red.”

“Then why in heaven’s name didn’t you say so before, you twit?” cried Mr. Cleaver. “I’m not short of money. I’ll give them the best flipping wine in the world if that’s what they want! What *is* the best wine in the world?”

“Claret, sir,” the butler replied, “from the greatest *chateaux* in Bordeaux – Lafite, Latour, Haut-Brion, Margaux, Mouton-Rothschild and Cheval Blanc. And from only the very greatest vintage years, which are, in my opinion, 1906, 1914, 1929 and 1945. Cheval Blanc was also magnificent in 1895 and 1921, and Haut-Brion in 1906.”

“Buy them all!” said Mr. Cleaver. “Fill the flipping cellar from top to bottom!”

“I can try, sir,” the butler said. “But wines like these are extremely rare and cost a fortune.”

“I don’t give a hoot what they cost!” said Mr. Cleaver. “Just go out and get them!”

That was easier said than done. Nowhere in England or in France could Tibbs find any wine from 1895, 1906, 1914 or 1921. But he did manage to get hold of some twenty-nines and forty-fives. The bills for these wines were astronomical. They were in fact so huge that even Mr. Cleaver began to sit up and take notice. And his interest quickly turned into outright enthusiasm when the butler suggested to him that a knowledge of wine was a very considerable social asset. Mr. Cleaver bought books on the subject and read them from cover to cover. He also learned a great deal from Tibbs himself, who taught him, among other things, just how wine should be properly tasted. “First, sir, you sniff it long and deep, with your nose right inside the top of the glass, like this. Then you take a mouthful and you open your lips a tiny bit and suck in air, letting the air bubble through the wine. Watch me do it. Then you roll it vigorously around your mouth. And finally you swallow it.”

“In due course, Mr. Cleaver came to regard himself as an expert on wine, and inevitably he turned into a colossal bore. “Ladies and gentlemen,” he would announce at dinner, holding up his glass, “this is a Margaux ’29! The greatest year of the century! Fantastic bouquet! Smells of cowslips! And notice especially the after taste and how the tiny trace of tannin gives it that glorious astringent quality! Terrific, ain’ it?”

The guests would nod and sip and mumble a few praises, but that was all.

“What’s the matter with the silly twerps?” Mr. Cleaver said to Tibbs after this had gone for some time. “Don’t none of them appreciate a great wine?”

The butler laid his head to one side and gazed upward. “I think they *would* appreciate it, sir,” he said, “if they were able to taste it. But they can’t.”

“What the heck d’you mean, they can’t taste it?”

“I believe, sir, that you have instructed Monsieur Estragon to put liberal quantities of vinegar in the salad-dressing.”

“What’s wrong with that? I like vinegar.”

“Vinegar,” the butler said, “is the enemy of wine. It destroys the palate. The dressing should be made of pure olive oil and a little lemon juice. Nothing else.”

“Hogwash!” said Mr. Cleaver.

“As you wish, sir.”

“I’ll say it again, Tibbs. You are talking hogwash. The vinegar don’t spoil my palate one bit.”

“You are very fortunate, sir,” the butler murmured, backing out of the room.

That night at dinner, the host began to mock his butler in front of the guests. “Mister Tibbs,” he said, “has been trying to tell me I can’t taste my wine if I put vinegar in the salad-dressing. Right, Tibbs?”

“Yes, sir,” Tibbs replied gravely.

“And I told him hogwash. Didn’t I, Tibbs?”

“Yes, sir.”

“This wine,” Mr. Cleaver went on, raising his glass, “tastes to me exactly like a Chateau Lafite ’45.”

Mr. Cleaver swung round in his chair and stared at the butler. “What the heck d’you mean,” he said. “There’s the empty bottles beside you to prove it!”

These great clarets, being old and full of sediment, were always decanted by Tibbs before dinner. They were served in cut-glass decanters, while the empty bottles, as is the custom, were placed on the sideboard for all to see.

“The wine you are drinking, sir,” the butler said quietly, “happens to be that cheap and rather odious Spanish red.”

Mr. Cleaver looked at the wine in his glass, then at the butler. The blood was coming to his face now, his skin was turning scarlet.

“You’re lying, Tibbs!” he said.

“No, sir, I’m not lying,” the butler said. “As a matter of fact, I have never served you any other wine but Spanish red since I’ve been here. It seemed to suit you very well.”

“I don’t believe him!” Mr. Cleaver cried out to his guests. “The man’s gone mad.”

“Great wines,” the butler said, “should be treated with reverence. It is bad enough to destroy the palate with three or four cocktails before dinner, as you people do, but when you slosh vinegar over your food into the bargain, then you might just as well be drinking dishwater.”

Ten outraged faces around the table stared at the butler. He had caught them off balance. They were speechless.

“This,” the butler said, reaching out and touching one of the empty bottles lovingly with his fingers, “this is the last of the forty-fives. The twenty-nines have already been finished. But they were glorious wines. Monsieur Estragon and I enjoy them immensely.”

The butler bowed and walked quite slowly from the room. He crossed the hall and went out of the front door of the house into the street where Monsieur Estragon was already loading their suitcases into the boot of the small car owned together.

### *Questions on comprehension:*

1. What was the aim of giving parties by the Cleavers?
2. Is Mr. Cleaver’s behaviour typical of a nouveau riche?
3. Why didn’t Mr. Cleaver follow all the instructions given by his butler to the full?

4. How did the butler revenge himself upon his master for being humiliated in front of the guests?
5. Is there any analogy between the guests' reaction to the butler's confession and Gogol's play "Inspector General"?

**Questions for discussion:**

1. How does the stylistic device of *antonomasia* characterize the main personages?
2. What are the peculiarities of Mr. Cleaver's speech?
3. Prove that the butler is a real connoisseur of wines.
4. What makes the butler understand that to teach his master anything is a mere waste of time?
5. Who is superior in manners and tact? Pick out examples from the text.
6. Do you approve of the butler's act after all?

## HER FIRST BALL

*By Katherine Mansfield*

Exactly when the ball began Leila would have found it hard to say. Perhaps her first real partner was the cab. It did not matter that she shared he cab with the Sheridan girls and their brother. She sat back in her own little corner of it, and the bolster on which her hand rested felt like the sleeve of an unknown young man's dress suit; and away they bowled, past waltzing lamp-posts and houses and fences and trees.

"Have you really never been to a ball before, Leila? But, my child, how too weird—" cried the Sheridan girls.

"Our nearest neighbour was fifteen miles, said Leila softly, gently opening and shutting her fan.

Oh dear, how hard it was to be indifferent like the others! She tried not to smile too much; she tried not to care. But every single thing was so new and exciting... Meg's tuberose, Jose's long loop of amber, Laura's little dark head, pushing above her white fur like a flower through snow. She would remember for ever. It even gave her a pang to see her cousin Laurie throw away the wisps of tissue paper he pulled from the fastenings of his new gloves. She would like to have kept those wisps as a keepsake, as a remembrance. Laurie leaned forward and put his hand on Laura's knee.

"Look here, darling," he said. "The third and the ninth as usual. Twig?"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Twig:** informal British term for "understand"

Oh, how marvellous to have a brother! In her excitement Leila felt that if there had been time, if it hadn't been impossible, she couldn't have helped crying because she was an only child and no brother had ever said "Twig?" to her; no sister would ever say, as Meg said to Jose that moment, "I've never known your hair go up more successfully than it has to-night!"

But, of course, there was no time. They were at the drill hall already; there were cabs in front of them and cabs behind. The road was bright on either side with moving fan-like lights, and on the pavement gay couples seemed to float through the air; little satin shoes chased each other like birds.

"Hold on me, Leila, you'll get lost," said Laura.

"Come on, girls, let's make a dash for it," said Laurie.

Leila put two fingers on Laura's pink velvet cloak, and they were somehow lifted past the big golden lantern, carried along the passage, and pushed into the little room marked "Ladies." Here the crowd was so great there was hardly space to take off their things; the noise was deafening. Two benches on either side were stacked high with wraps. Two old women in white aprons ran up and down tossing fresh armfuls. And everybody was pressing forward trying to get at the little dressing-table and mirror at the far end.

A great quivering jet of gas lighted the ladies' room. It couldn't wait; it was dancing already. When the door opened again and there came a burst of tuning from the drill hall, it leaped almost to ceiling.

Dark girls, fair girls were patting their hair, tying ribbons again, tucking handkerchiefs down the fronts of their bodices, smoothing marble-white gloves. And because they were all laughing it seemed to Leila that they were all lovely.

"Aren't there any invisible hairpins?" cried a voice. "How most extraordinary! I can't see a single invisible hairpin."

"Powder my back, there's a darling," cried someone else.

"But I must have a needle and cotton. I've torn simply miles and miles of the frill," wailed a third.

Then, "Pass them along, pass them along!" The straw basket of programmes was tossed from arm to arm. Darling little pink-and-silver programmes, with pink pencils and fluffy tassels. Leila's fingers shook as she took one out of the basket. She wanted to ask someone, "Am I meant to have one too?" but she had just time to read: "Waltz 3. *Two, Two in a Canoe*. Polka 4. *Making the Feathers Fly*," when Meg cried, "Ready, Leila?" and they pressed their way through the crush in the passage towards the big double doors of the drill hall.

Dancing had not begun yet, but the band had stopped tuning, and the noise was so great it seemed that when it did begin to play it would never be heard. Leila, pressing close to Meg, looking over Meg's shoulder, felt that even the little quivering coloured flags strung across the ceiling were talking. She quite forgot to be shy; she forgot how in the middle of dressing she had sat down on the bed with one shoe off and one shoe on and begged her mother to ring up her cousins and say she couldn't go after all. And the rush of longing she had had to

be sitting on the veranda of their forsaken up-country home, listening to the baby owls crying "More pork" in the moonlight, was changed to a rush of joy so sweet that it was hard to bear alone. She clutched her fan, and, gazing at her gleaming golden floor, the azaleas, the lanterns, the stage at one end with its red carpet and gilt chairs and the band in the corner, she thought breathlessly, "How heavenly; how simply heavenly!"

All the girls stood grouped together at one side of the doors, the men at the other, and the chaperones in dark dresses, smiling rather foolishly, walked with little careful steps over the polished floor towards the stage.

"This is my little country cousin Leila. Be nice to her. Find her partners; she's under my wing," said Meg, going up to one girl after another.

Strange faces smiled at Leila—sweetly, vaguely. Strange voices answered, "Of course, my dear." But Leila felt the girls didn't really see her. They were looking towards the men. Why didn't the men begin? What were they waiting for? There they stood, smoothing their gloves, patting their glossy hair and smiling among themselves. Then, quite suddenly, as if they had only just made up their minds that that was what they had to do, the men came gliding over parquet. There was a joyful flutter among the girls. A tall, fair man flew up to Meg, seized her programme, scribbled something; Meg passed him on to Leila. "May I have the pleasure?" He ducked and smiled. There came a dark man wearing an eyeglass, then cousin Laurie with a friend, and Laura with a little freckled fellow whose tie was crooked. Then quite an old man—fat, with a big bald patch on his head—took her programme and murmured, "Let me see, let me see!" And he was a long time comparing his programme, which looked black with names, with hers. It seemed to give him so much trouble that Leila was ashamed. "Oh, please don't bother," she said eagerly. But instead of replying the fat man wrote something, glanced at her again. "Do I remember this bright little face?" he said softly. "Is it known to me of yore?" At that moment the band began playing; the fat man disappeared. He was tossed away on a great wave of music that came flying over the gleaming floor, breaking the groups up into couples, scattering them, sending them spinning. . . .

Leila had learned to dance at boarding school. Every Saturday afternoon the boarders were hurried off to a little corrugated iron mission hall where Miss Eccles (of London) held her "select" classes. But the difference between that dusty—smelling hall—with calico texts on the walls, the poor terrified little woman in a brown velvet toque with rabbits ears thumping the cold piano, Miss Eccles poking the girls' feet with her long white wand—and this, was so tremendous that Leila was sure if her partner didn't come and she had to listen to that marvellous music and to watch the others sliding, gliding over the golden floor, she would die at least, or faint, or lift her arms and fly out of one of those dark windows that showed the stars.

“Ours, I think—“ Someone bowed, smiled, and offered her his arm; she hadn’t to die after all. Someone’s hand pressed her waist, and she floated away like a flower that is tossed into a pool.

“Quite a good floor, isn’t it?” drawled a faint voice close to her ear.

“I think it’s most beautifully slippery,” said Leila.

“Pardon!” The faint voice sounded surprised. Leila said it again. And there was a tiny pause before the voice echoed, “Oh, quite! And she was swung up again.

He steered so beautifully. That was the great difference between dancing with girls and men, Leila decided. Girls banged into each other and stamped on each other’s feet; the girl who was gentleman always clutched you so.

The azaleas were separate flowers no longer; they were pink and white flags streaming by.

“Were you at the Bells’ last week?” the voice came again. It sounded tired. Leila wondered whether she ought to ask him if he would like to stop.

“No, this is my first dance,” she said.

Her partner gave a little gasping laugh.

“Oh, I say,” he protested.

“Yes, it is really the first dance I’ve ever been to,” Leila was most fervent. It was such a relief to be able to tell somebody. “You see, I’ve lived in the country all my life up till now....”

At that moment the music stopped and they went to sit on two chairs against the wall. Leila tucked her pink satin feet under and fanned herself, while she blissfully watched the other couples passing and disappearing through the swing doors.

“Enjoying yourself, Leila?” asked Jose, nodding her golden hair.

Laura passed and gave her the faintest little wink; it made Leila wonder for a moment whether she was quite grown up after all. Certainly her partner did not say very much. He coughed, tucked his handkerchief away, pulled down his waistcoat, took a minute thread off his sleeve. But it didn’t matter. Almost immediately the band started and her second partner seemed to spring from the ceiling.

“Floor’s not bad,” said the new voice. Did one always begin with the floor? And then, “Were you at the Neaves’ on Tuesday?” And again Leila explained. Perhaps it was a little strange that her partners were not more interested. For it was thrilling. Her first ball! She was only at the beginning of everything. It seemed to her that she had never known what the night was like before. Up till now it had been dark, silent, beautiful very often—oh yes—but mournful somehow. Solemn. And now it would never be like that again—it had opened dazzling bright.

“Care for an ice?” said her partner. And they went through the swing doors, down the passage, to the supper-room. Her cheeks burned, she was fearfully thirsty. How sweet the ices looked on little glass plates and how cold the frosted spoon was, iced too! And when they came back to the hall there was the fat man waiting for her by the door. It gave her quite a shock again to see how old he

was; he ought to be on the stage with the fathers and mothers. And when Leila compared him with her other partners he looked shabby. His waistcoat was creased, there was a button off his glove, his coat looked as if it was dusty with French chalk.

“Come along, little lady,” said the fat man. He scarcely troubled to clasp her, and they moved away so gently, it was more like walking than dancing. But he said not a word about the floor. “Your first dance, isn’t it?” he murmured.”

“How *did* you know?”

“Ah,” said the fat man, “that’s what it is to be old!” He wheezed faintly as he steered her past an awkward couple. “You see, I’ve been doing this kind of thing for the last thirty years.”

“Thirty years?” cried Leila. Twelve years before she was born!” It hardly bears thinking about, does it?” said the fat man gloomily. Leila looked at his bald head, and she felt quite sorry for him.

“I think it’s still marvellous to be going on,” she said kindly.

“Kind little lady,” said the fat man, and he pressed her a little closer and hummed a bar of the waltz. “Of course,” he said, “you can’t hope to last anything like as long as that. No-o,” said the fat man, “long before that you’ll be sitting up there on the stage, looking on, in your nice black velvet. And these pretty arms will have turned into little short fat ones, and you’ll beat time with such a different kind of fan - a black ebony one.” The fat man seemed to shudder. “And you’ll smile away like the poor old dears up there, and point to your daughter, and tell the elderly lady next to you how some dreadful man tried to kiss her at the club hall. And your heart will ache, ache” – the fat man squeezed her closer still, as if he really was sorry for that poor heart – “because no one wants to kiss you now. And you’ll say how unpleasant these polished floors are to walk on, how dangerous they are. Eh, Mademoiselle Twinkle toes?” said the fat man softly.

Leila gave a light little laugh, but she did not feel like laughing. Was it - could all be true? It sounded terribly true. Was this first ball only the beginning of her last ball, after all? At that music seemed to change; it sounded sad, sad; it rose upon a great sigh. Oh, how quickly things changed! Why didn’t happiness last for ever? For ever wasn’t a bit too long.

“I want to stop,” she said in a breathless voice. The fat man led her to the door.

“No,” she said, “I won’t go outside. I won’t sit down. I’ll just stand here, thank you.” She leaned against the wall, tapping with her foot, pulling up her gloves and trying to smile. But deep inside her a little girl threw her pinafore over her head and sobbed. Why had he spoiled it all?

“I say, you know,” said the fat man, “you mustn’t take me seriously, little lady.”

“As if I should!” said Leila, tossing her small dark head and sucking her underlip...



Again the couples paraded. The swing doors opened and shut. Now new music was given out by the bandmaster. But Leila didn't want to dance any more. She wanted to be home, or sitting on the veranda listening to those baby owls. When she looked through the dark windows at the stars they had long beams like wings ...

But presently a soft, melting, ravishing tune began, and a young man with curly hair bowed before her. She would have to dance, out of politeness, until she could find Meg. Very stiffly she walked into the middle; very haughtily she put her hand on his sleeve. But in one minute, in one turn, her feet glided, glided. The lights, the azaleas, the dresses, the pink faces the velvet chairs, all became one beautiful flying wheel. And when her next partner bumped her into the fat man and he said, "Pardon," she smiled at him more radiantly than ever. She didn't even recognize him again.

### ***Questions on comprehension:***

1. *What do we know about Leila's background?*
2. *Explain how Leila feels about the ball while she is dressing.*
3. *Describe her feelings when she finally arrives at the ball.*
4. *What does the old man tell Leila during their dance? Summarize her various reactions to what he says.*
5. *Describe how Leila gradually regains her interest in the dance at the end of the story.*

### ***Questions for discussion:***

1. *Do you think that the story ends on a happy note?*
2. *Explain how Leila's feelings about the ball are typical of people who eagerly await an upcoming event.*
3. *Can you see the analogy between **Alice in Wonderland** and Leila?*
4. *Why is Leila's reaction to the old man's speculations so unusual?*
5. *What helps Leila to regain her interest in the ball?*

## **THE FILIPINO AND THE DRUNKARD**

*By William Saroyan*

This loud – mouthed guy in the brown camel – hair coat was not really mean, he was drunk. He took a sudden dislike to the small well – dressed Filipino and began to order him around the waiting – room, telling him to get back, not to crown up among the white people. They were waiting to get on the boat and cross the bay to Oakland. If he hadn't been drunk no one would have

bothered to notice him at all, but as it was, he was making a commotion in the waiting – room, and while everyone seemed to be in sympathy with the Filipino, no one seemed to want to bother about coming to the boy’s rescue, and the poor Filipino was becoming very frightened.

He stood among the people, and this drunkard kept pushing up against him and saying, “I told you to get back. Now get back. Go away back. I fought twenty – four months in France. I’m a real American. I don’t want you standing up here among white people.”

The boy kept squeezing nimbly and politely out of the drunkard’s way, hurrying through the crowd, not saying anything and trying his best to be as decent as possible. He kept dodging in and out, with the drunkard stumbling after him, and as time went on the drunkard’s dislike grew and he began to swear at the boy. He kept saying, “You fellows are the best – dressed men in San-Francisco, and you make your money washing dishes. You’ve got no right to wear such fine clothes.”

He swore a lot, and it got so bad that a lot of ladies had to imagine they were deaf and weren’t hearing any of the things he was saying.

When the big door opened, the young Filipino moved swiftly among the people, fleeing from the drunkard, reaching the boat before anyone else. He ran to a corner, sat down for a moment, then got up and began looking for a more hidden place. At the other end of the boat was the drunkard. He could hear the man swearing. He looked about for a place to hide, and rushed into the lavatory. He went into one of the open compartments and bolted the door.

The drunkard entered the lavatory and began asking others in the room if they had seen the boy. He was a real American, he said. He had been wounded twice in the War.

In the lavatory he swore more freely, using words he could never use where women were present. He began to stoop and look beyond the shut doors of the various compartments. I beg your pardon, he said to those he was not seeking, and when he came to the compartment where the boy was standing, he was swearing and demanding that the boy come out.

“You can’t get away from me,” he said. “You got no right to use a place white men use. Come out or I’ll break the door.”

“Go away,” the boy said.

The drunkard began to pound on the door.

“You got to come out sometime,” he said. “I’ll wait here till you do.”

“Go away,” said the boy. “I’ve done nothing to you.”

He wondered why none of the men in the lavatory had the decency to calm the drunkard and take him away, and then he realized there were no other men in the lavatory.

“Go away,” he said.

The drunkard answered with curses, pounding the door.

Behind the door the boy's bitterness grew to rage. He began to tremble, not fearing the man but fearing the rage growing in himself. He brought the knife from his pocket and drew open the sharp blade, holding the knife in his fist so tightly that the nails of his fingers cut into the flesh of his palm.

"Go away," he said. "I have a knife. I do not want any trouble."

The drunkard said he was an American. Twenty-four months in France. Wounded twice. Once in the leg, and once in the thigh. He would not go away. He was afraid of no dirty little yellow-belly Filipino with a knife. Let the Filipino come out, he was an American.

"I will kill you," said the boy. "I do not want to kill any man. You are drunk. Go away."

"Please do not make any trouble," he said earnestly.

He could hear the motor of the boat pounding. It was like his rage pounding. It was a feeling of having been humiliated, chased about and made to hide, and now it was a wish to be free even if he had to kill. He threw the door open and tried to rush beyond the man, the knife tight in his fist, but the drunkard caught him by the sleeve and drew him back. The sleeve of the boy's coat ripped, and the boy turned and thrust the knife into the side of the drunkard, feeling it scrape against rib-bone. The drunkard shouted and screamed at once, then caught the boy at the throat, and the boy began to thrust the knife into the side of the man many times, as a boxer jabs in the clinches.

When the drunkard could no longer hold him and had fallen to the floor, the boy rushed from the room, the knife still in his hand, blood dripping from the blade, his hat gone, his hair mussed, and the sleeve of his coat badly torn.

Everyone knew what he had done, yet no one moved.

The boy ran to the front of the boat, seeking some place to go, then ran back to a corner, no one daring to speak to him, and everyone aware of the crime.

There was no place to go, and before the officers of the boat arrived he stopped suddenly and began to shout at the people.

"I did not want to hurt him," he said. "Why didn't you stop him? Is it right to chase a man like a rat? You knew he was drunk. I did not want to hurt him, but he would not let me go. He tore my coat and tried to choke me. I told him I would kill him if he would not go away. It is not my fault. I must go to Oakland to see my brother. He is sick. Do you think I am looking for trouble when my brother is sick? Why didn't you stop him?"

### ***Questions on comprehension:***

- 1. What is the time and the place of action?*
- 2. Give a detailed description of a drunkard and of a Filipino boy.*
- 3. Why did the drunkard take a dislike to the Filipino? Give his life story.*
- 4. What was the aim of the Filipino's trip to Oakland?*
- 5. What attempts did the boy try to undertake to get rid of the drunkard?*

**Questions for discussion:**

1. What problem is raised in this short story?
2. Why didn't other people even try to calm the drunkard? Did they approve of his behaviour?
3. What are the SD's that show that the boy was in despair?
4. Was it possible for the boy (for the other people) to stop the murder? Prove it.
5. Can you justify the Filipino?
6. Did the boy do everything possible to avert the disaster?

**THE BROKEN BOOT**

*By John Galsworthy*

The actor, Gilbert Caister, who had been "out" for six months, emerged from his east-coast seaside lodging about noon in the day, after the opening of "Shooting the Rapids", on tour, in which he was playing Dr. Dominick in the last act. A salary of four pounds a week would not, he was conscious, remake his fortunes, but a certain jauntiness had returned to the gait and manner of one employed again at last.

Fixing his monocle, he stopped before a fishmonger's and, with a faint smile on his face, regarded a lobster. Ages since he had eaten a lobster! One could long for a lobster without paying, but the pleasure was not solid enough to detain him. He moved upstreet and stopped again, before a tailor's window. Together with the actual tweeds, in which he could so easily fancy himself refitted, he could see a reflection of himself, in the faded brown suit wangled out of the production of "Marmaduke Mandeville" the year before the war. The sunlight in this damned town was very strong, very hard on seams and buttonholes, on knees and elbows! Yet he received the ghost of aesthetic pleasure from the reflected elegance of a man long fed only twice a day, of an eyeglass well rimmed out from a soft brown eye, of a velour hat salvaged from the production of "Educating Simon" in 1912; and in front of the window he removed that hat, for under it was his new phenomenon, not yet quite evaluated, his *meche blanche*. Was it an asset, or the beginning of the end? It reclined backwards on the right side, conspicuous in his dark hair, above that shadowy face always interesting to Gilbert Caister. They said it came from atrophy of the—something nerve, an effect of the war, or of undernourished tissue. Rather distinguished, perhaps, but--?

He walked on, and became conscious that he had passed a face he knew. Turning, he saw it also turn on a short and dapper figure — a face rosy, bright,

round, with an air of cherubic knowledge, as of a getter-up of amateur theatricals.

Bryce- Green, by George!

“Caister? It is! Haven’t seen you since you left the old camp. Remember what sport we had over ‘Gotta Grampus’? By Jove! I am glad to see you. Doing anything with yourself? Come and have lunch with me.”

Bryce- Green, the wealthy patron, the moving spirit of entertainment in that south- coast convalescent camp. And drawling slightly, Caister answered:

“I shall be delighted.” But within him something did not drawl. “By God, you’re going to have a feed, my boy!”

And—elegantly threadbare, roundabout and dapper—the two walked side by side.

“Know this place? Let’s go in here! Phyllis, cocktails for my friend Mr. Caister and myself, and caviare on biscuits. Mr. Caister is playing here; you must go and see him.”

The girl who served the cocktails and the caviare looked up at Caister with interested blue eyes. Precious! – he had been “out” for six months!

“Nothing of a part,” he drawled, “took it to feel a gap.” And below his waistcoat the gap echoed: “Yes, and it’ll take some filling.”

“Bring your cocktail along, Caister, we’ll go into the little further room, there’ll be nobody there. What shall we have- a lobster?”

And Caister murmured, “I love lobstahs.”

“Very fine and large here. And how are you, Caister? So awfully glad to see you- only real actor we had.”

“Thanks,” said Caister. “I’m all right.” And he thought, “He’s a damned amateur, but a nice little man.”

“Sit here. Waiter, bring us a good big lobster and a salad; and then – er - a small fillet of beef with potatoes fried crisp, and a bottle of my special hock! Ah! And a rum omelette – plenty of rum and sugarh. Twig?”

And Caister thought: “Thank God, I do.”

They had sat down opposite each other at one of two small tables in the little recessed room.

“Luck!” said Bryce-Green.

“Luck!” replied Caister; and the cocktail trickling down him echoed: “Luck!”

“And what do you of the state of drama?”

Oh! Ho! A question after his own heart. Balancing his monocle by a sweetish smile on the opposite side of his mouth, Caister drawled his answer: “Quite too bally awful!”

“H’m! Yes,” said Bryce-Green, “nobody with any genius, is there?”

And Caister thought: “Nobody with any money.”

“Have you been playing anything great? You were so awfully good in ‘Gotta-Grampus’!”

"Nothing particular. I've been – er - rather slack." And with their feel around his waist his trousers seemed to echo: "Slack!"

"Ah!" said Bryce- Green. "Here we are! Do you like claws?"

"Tha-a-nks. Anything!" To eat- until warned by the pressure of his waist against his trousers! What a feast! And what a flow of his own tongue suddenly released – on drama, music, art: mellow and critical, stimulated by the round eyes and interjections of his little provincial host.

"By Jove, Caister! You've got a *meche blanche*. Never noticed. I'm awfully interested in *meches blanches*. Don't think me too frightfully rude – but did it come suddenly?"

"No, gradually."

"And how do you account for it?"

"Try starvation," trembled on Caister's lips.

"I don't," he said.

"I think it's ripping. Have some more omelette? I often wish I'd gone on the regular stage myself, like you."

Topping?

"Have a cigar. Waiter! Coffee, and cigars. I shall come and see you tonight. Suppose you'll be here a week?"

Topping! The laughter and applause - "Mr. Caister's rendering left nothing to be desired; its - and – its are in the true spirit of - !"

Silence recalled him from his rings of smoke. Bryce-Green was sitting, with cigar held out and mouth a little open, and bright eyes round as pebbles, - fixed on some object near the floor, past the corner of the tablecloth. Had he burnt his mouth? The eyelids fluttered; he looked at Caister, licked his lips like a dog, nervously and said:

"I say, old chap, don't think me a beast, but are you at all- er- er- rocky? I mean – if I can be of any service, don't hesitate! Old acquaintance, don't you know, and all that-"

His eyes rolled out again towards the object, and Caister followed them. Out there above the carpet he saw it – his own boot. It dangled slightly, six inches off the ground – split – right across, twice, between lace and toecap. Quite! He knew it. A boot left him from the role of Bertie Carstairs, in "The Dupe", just before the war. Good boots. His only pair, except the boots of Dr. Dominick, which he was nursing. And from the boot he looked back at Bryce-Green, sleek and concerned. A drop, black when it left his heart, suffused his eye behind the monocle; his smile curled bitterly; he said:

"Not at all, thanks! Why?"

"Oh, n-n-nothing. It just occurred to me." His eyes- but Caister had withdrawn the boot. Bryce-Green paid the bill and rose.

"Old chap, if you'll excuse me; engaged at half past two. So awf'ly glad to have seen you. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Caister. "Thanks."

He was alone. And, chin on the hand, he stared through his monocle into an empty coffee cup. Alone with his heart, his boot, his life to come... "And what have you been lately, Mr. Caister?" "Nothing very much lately. Of course I've played almost everything." "Quite so. Perhaps you'll leave your address; can't say anything definite, I'm afraid." "I- I should - er- be willing to rehearse on approval; or - if I could the part?" "Thank you, afraid we haven't got as far as that." "No? Quite! Well, I shall hear from you perhaps." And Caister could see his own eyes looking at the manager. God! What a look!... A topping life! A dog's life! Cadging - cadging - cadging for work! A life of draughty waiting, of concealed beggary, of terrible depressions of want of food!

The waiter came skating round as if he desired to clear. Must go! Two young women had come in and were sitting at the other table between him and the door. He saw look at him, and his sharpened senses caught the whisper:

"Sure - in the last act. Don't you see his *meche blanche*?"

"Oh! Yes - of course! Isn't it - wasn't he - I"

Caister straightened his back; his smile crept out, he fixed his monocle. They had spotted his Dr. Dominick!

"If you've quite finished, sir, may I clear?"

"Certainly. I'm going." He gathered himself and rose. The young women were gazing up. Elegant, with a faint smile, he passed them close, so that they could not see, managing - his broken boot.

### ***Questions for comprehension:***

1. *What are the two main characters?*
2. *Under what circumstances had they met before?*
3. *What did the old acquaintances talk about during the dinner?*
4. *What was Bryce's reaction to Caister's broken boot?*
5. *What made Caister regain his dignity again?*

### ***Questions for discussion:***

1. *Try to imagine the main character's background.*
2. *What kind of life did the actor lead before he got a new role?*
3. *Why did Caister play the part of a successful actor in front of his old acquaintance?*
4. *Did he ever envy his acquaintance's prosperity?*
5. *Why did he refuse Bryce's offer to help him materially?*
6. *What helped Caister to revive spiritually?*

## THE COP AND THE ANTHEM

*By O. Henry*

On his bench in Madison Square Soapy moved uneasily. When wild geese honk high of nights, and when women without sealskin coats grow kind to their husbands, and when Soapy moves uneasily on his bench in the park, you may know that winter is near at hand.

A dead leaf fell in Soapy's lap. That was Jack Frost's card. Jack is kind to the regular denizens of Madison Square, and gives fair warning of his annual call. At the corners of four streets he hands his pasteboard to the North Wind, footman of the mansion of All Outdoors, so that the inhabitants thereof may make ready.

Soapy's mind became cognizant of the fact that the time had come for him to resolve himself into a singular Committee of Ways and Means to provide against the coming rigours. And therefore he moved uneasily on his bench.

The hibernatorial ambitions of Soapy were not of the highest. In them there were no considerations of Mediterranean cruises, of soporific Southern skies or drifting in the Vesuvian Bay. Three months on the Island was what his soul craved. Three months of assured board and bed and congenial company, safe from Boreas and bluecoats, seemed to Soapy the essence of things desirable.

For years the hospitable Blackwell's had been his winter quarters. Just as his more fortunate fellow New Yorkers had bought their tickets to Palm Beach and the Riviera each winter, so Soapy had made his humble arrangements for his annual hegira to the Island. And now the time was come. On the previous nights three Sabbath newspapers, distributed beneath his coat, about his ankles, and over his lap, had failed to repulse the cold as he slept on his bench near the spurting fountain in the ancient square. So the Island loomed big and timely in Soapy's mind. He scorned the provisions made in the name of charity for the city's dependents. In Soapy's opinion the Law was more benign than Philanthropy. There was an endless round of institutions, municipal and eleemosynary, on which he might set out and receive lodging and food accordant with the simple life. But to one of Soapy's private spirit the gifts of charity are encumbered. If not in coin you must pay in humiliation of spirit for every benefit received at the hands of philanthropy. As Caesar had his Brutus, every bed of charity must have its toll of a bath, every loaf of bread its compensation of a private and personal inquisition. Wherefore it is better to be a guest of the law, which, though conducted by rules, does not meddle unduly with a gentleman's private affairs.

Soapy, having decided to go to the Island, at once set about accomplishing his desire. There were many easy ways of doing this. The pleasantest was to dine luxuriously at some expensive restaurant; and then, after declaring insolvency,



be handed over quietly and without uproar to a policeman. An accommodating magistrate would be the rest.

Soapy left his bench and strolled out of the square and across the level sea of asphalt, where Broadway and Fifth Avenue flow together. Up Broadway he turned, and halted at a glittering cafe, where are gathered together nightly the choicest products of the grape, the silkworm, and the protoplasm.

Soapy had confidence in himself from the lowest button of his vest upward. He was shaven, and his coat was decent and his neat black, ready-tied, four-in-hand had been presented to him by a lady missionary on Thanksgiving Day. If he could reach a table in the restaurant unsuspected success would be his. The portion of him that would show above his table would raise no doubt in the waiter's mind. A roasted mallard duck, thought Soapy, would be about the thing- with a bottle of Chablis, and then Camembert, a demi-tasse and a cigar. One dollar for the cigar would be enough. The total would not be so high as to call forth any supreme manifestation of revenge from the cafe management; and yet the meat would leave him filled and happy for the journey to his winter refuge.

But as Soapy set foot inside the restaurant door the head-waiter's eye fell upon his frayed trousers and decadent shoes. Strong and ready hands turned him about and conveyed him in silence and haste to the sidewalk and averted the ignoble fate of the menaced mallard.

Soapy turned off Broadway. It seemed that his route to the coveted Island was not to be an epicurean one. Some other way of entering limbo must be thought of.

At a corner of Sixth Avenue electric lights and cunningly displayed wares behind plate-glass made a shop window conspicuous. Soapy took a cobblestone and dashed it through the glass. People came running around the corner, a policeman in the lead. Soapy stood still, with his hands in his pockets, and smiled at the sight of brass buttons.

"Where's the man that done that?" inquired the officer excitedly.

"Don't you figure out that I might have had something to do with it?" said Soapy, not without sarcasm, but friendly, as one greets good fortunate.

The policeman's mind refused to accept Soapy even as a clue. Men who smash windows do not remain to parley with the law's minions. They take to their heels. The policeman saw a man half way down the block running to catch a car. With drawn club he joined in the pursuit. Soapy, with disgust in his heart, loafed along, twice unsuccessful.

On the opposite side of the street was a restaurant of no great pretensions. It catered to large appetites and modern purses. Its crockery and atmosphere were thick; its soup and napery thin. Into this place Soapy took his accusive shoes and telltale trousers without challenge. At a table he sat and consumed beefsteak, flapjacks, doughnuts and pie. And then to the waiter he betrayed the fact that the minutest coin and himself were strangers.

“Now, get busy and call a cop,” said Soapy. “And don’t keep a gentleman waiting.”

“No cop for youse,” said the waiter, with a voice like butter cakes and an eye like the cherry in a Manhattan cocktail. “Hey, Con!”

Neatly upon his left ear on the callous pavement two waiters pitched Soapy. He arose, joint by joint, as a carpenter’s rule opens, and beat the dust from his clothes. Arrest seemed but a rosy dream. The Island seemed very far away. A policeman who stood before a drug store two doors away laughed and walked down the street.

Five blocks Soapy travelled before his courage permitted him to woo capture again. This time the opportunity presented what he fatuously termed to himself a “cinch.” A young woman of a modest and pleasing guise was standing before a show window gazing with sprightly interest at its display of shaving mugs and inkstands, and two yards from the window a large policeman of severe demeanor leaned against a water plug.

It was Soapy’s design to assume the role of the despicable and execrated “masher.” The refined and elegant appearance of his victim and the contiguity of the conscientious cop encouraged him to believe that he would soon feel the pleasant official clutch upon his arm that would insure his winter quarters on the right little, tight little isle.

Soapy straightened the lady missionary’s ready-made tie, dragged his shrinking cuffs into the open, sat his hat at a killing cant and sidled toward the young woman. He made eyes at her, was taken with sudden coughs and “Hems,” smiled, smirked, and was brazenly through the impudent and contemptible litany of the “masher.” With half an eye Soapy saw that the policeman was watching him fixedly. The young woman moved away a few steps, and again bestowed her absorbed attention upon the shaving mugs. Soapy followed, boldly stepping to her side, raised his hat and said:

“Ah there, Bedelia! Don’t you want to come and play in my yard?”

The policeman was still looking. The persecuted young woman had but to beckon a finger and Soapy would be practically en route for his insular haven. Already he imagined he could feel the cozy warmth of the station house. The young woman faced him and, stretching out a hand, caught Soapy’s coat sleeve.

“Sure, Mike,” she said joyfully, “if you’ll blow me to a pail of suds. I’d have spoke to you sooner, but the cop was watching.”

With the young woman playing the clinging ivy to his oak Soapy walked past the policeman overcome with gloom. He seemed doomed to liberty.

At the next corner he shook off his companion and ran. He halted in the district where by night are found the lightest streets, hearts, vows, and librettos. Women in furs and men in greatcoats moved gaily in the wintry air. A sudden fear seized Soapy that some dreadful enchantment had rendered him immune to arrest. The thought brought a little of panic upon it, and when he came upon

another policeman lounging grandly in front of a transplendent theatre he caught at the immediate straw of “disorderly conduct.”

On the sidewalk Soapy began to yell drunken gibberish at the top of his harsh voice. He danced, howled, raved, and otherwise disturbed the welkin.

The policeman twirled his club. Turned his back to Soapy, and remarked to a citizen:

“Tis one of them Yale lads celebratin’ the goose egg they give to the Hartford College. Noisy; but no harm. We’ve instruction to lave them be.”

Disconsolate, Soapy ceased his unavailing racket. Would never a policeman lay hands on him? In his fancy the Island seemed an unattainable Arcadia. He buttoned his thin coat against the chilling wind.

In a cigar store he saw a well-dressed man lighting a cigar at a swinging light. His silk umbrella he had set by the door on entering. Soapy stepped inside, secured the umbrella, and sauntered off with it slowly. The man at the cigar light followed hastily.

“My umbrella,” he said sternly.

“Oh, is it?” sneered Soapy, adding insult to petit larceny. “Well, why don’t you call a policeman? I took it. Your umbrella! Why don’t you call a cop? There stands one on the corner.”

The umbrella owner slowed his steps. Soapy did likewise, with a presentiment that luck would again run against him. The policeman looked at the two curiously.

“Of course,” said the umbrella man—“that is—well, you know how these mistakes occur—I—if it’s your umbrella I hope you’ll excuse me—I picked it up this morning in a restaurant—if you recognize it as yours, why—I hope you’ll—”

“Of course it’s mine,” said Soapy, viciously.

The ex- umbrella man retreated. The policeman hurried to assist a tall blonde in an opera cloak across the street in front of a street car that was approaching two blocks away.

Soapy walked eastward through a street damaged by improvement. He hurled the umbrella wrathfully into an excavation. He muttered against the men who wear helmets and carry clubs. Because he wanted to fall into their clutches, they seemed to regard him as a king who could do no wrong.

At length Soapy reached one of the avenues to the east where the glitter and turmoil was but faint. He set his face down this towards Madison Square, for the homing instinct survives even when the home is a park bench.

But on the unusually quiet corner Soapy came to a standstill. Here was an old church, quaint and rambling and gabled. Through one violet- stained window a soft light glowed, where, no doubt, the organist loitered over the keys, making sure of his mastery of the coming Sabbath anthem. For there drifted out to Soapy’s ears sweet music that caught and held him transfixed against the convolutions of the iron fence.

The moon was above, lustrous and serene; vehicles and pedestrians were few; sparrows twittered sleepily in the eaves- for a little while the scene might have been a country churchyard. And the anthem that the organist played cemented Soapy to the iron fence, for he had known it well in the days when his life contained such things as mothers and roses and ambitions and friends and immaculate thoughts and collars.

The conjunction of Soapy's receptive state of mind and the influence about the old church wrought a sudden and wondering change in his soul. He viewed with swift horror the pit into which he had tumbled, the degraded days, unworthy desires, dead hopes, wrecked faculties, and base motives that made up his existence.

And also in a moment his heart responded thrillingly to this novel mood. An instantaneous and strong impulse moved him to battle with his desperate fate. He would pull himself out of the mire; he would make a man of himself again; he would conquer the evil that had taken possession of him. There was time; he was comparatively young yet; he would resurrect his old eager ambitions and pursue them without faltering. Those solemn but sweet organ notes had set up a revolution in him. To-morrow he would go into the roaring downtown district and find work. A fur importer had once offered him a place as driver. He would find him to-morrow and ask for the position. He would be somebody in the world. He would-

Soapy felt a hand laid on his arm. He looked quickly around into the broad face of a policeman.

"What are you doin' here?" asked the officer.

"Nothin'," said Soapy.

"Then come along," said the policeman.

"Three months on the Island," said the Magistrate in the Police Court the next morning.

### ***Questions for comprehension:***

1. *What is the time and place of action?*
2. *How did Soapy get used to spending wintertime?*
3. *What minor offences did Soapy try to commit to get a three-month term in prison?*
4. *How did the anthem affect his inner state?*
5. *What were Soapy's plans for future?*
6. *Why did the policeman arrest him?*

### ***Questions for discussion:***

1. *Do you sympathize with homeless Soapy who makes up his mind to spend winter in prison? Was it to be his first experience?*

2. *What language means make the text sound ironical?*
3. *At what episode does the ironical tone gradually change into lyrical?*
4. *Was Soapy pleased that his intention to get into prison was finally realized?*
5. *How can you account for the title of the story?*
6. *Try to find analogy in world literature when art has changed the mode of life of a character.*

## **DYING ISN'T EASY**

*By John Sommerfield*

At the end of the long furrow that it had ploughed in its final landing lay the burnt-out frame of a fighter aircraft. The sun was setting. From each sand hill and hummock, each cactus bush, each shrivelled clump of thorny desert scrub, stretched a long purplish shadow that reached for the darkening horizon. Yet, still, in the hot sand and the vast, empty sky, lingered noon's blazing heat, while the aching silence, belonging neither to night nor day, seemed to hold the crystal stillness of the air that had never known the sounds of life.

Enspersed in this silence, this sand and light, the wrecked aircraft lay like the skeleton of some great animal that had dragged itself here to die ten thousand years ago. Its silvery bones, smoke-blackened and brittle with heat, seemed slowly to be crumbling away from within under the invisible and unceasing nibblings of time; it seemed that only the air's ancient stillness had preserved their form, that one breath of wind would be enough to reduce them to instant shapeless dust. The bleached sand might never have known a drop of moisture, a sign of moving air; a footprint could here endure for a whole century, and that long, ragged scarf of ploughed-up desert trailed out behind the wreck might have been as old and durable a trace as the scuffled imprint of some giant reptile's tail fossilized in prehistoric mud.

Yet these antique-seeming metallic bones were still hot from the flames of their catastrophe, the very dust cloud churned up by the crash had hardly settled. And the pilot was not dead yet. He lay, a little distance away, one leg crumpled under him, his broken jaw hanging a little sideways, disclosing bloodied gums and the stumps of smashed teeth; blood caked his face and blackened his clothes. Only his eyes lived, moved slightly, and seemed to be staring at the little river of ants that flowed aimlessly down the side of a sand ripple.

He knows that he's still alive, but isn't yet conscious enough to realize that it won't be long before he will be dead. He is aware only of the sensations inside him, which are not exactly painful, but strange, horrible and frightening, as if there was something odd, something at once rubbery and metallic, coiled within his entrails and slowly swelling there.

He tried to move. A trickle of thick, dark blood spills from the corner of his mouth and on to the thirsty sand. The pain of his broken leg darts through his nerves, and he relapses into oblivion.

Celled in its broken flesh, lost in unconsciousness, the mind yet lives and wakes, moves freely in its past, its now all memories. Now he lives again the moment of the crash, the horizon rising, the desert swooping up at him in a nightmare of frozen time as he waits with contracted muscles the shudderingly expected surprise of impact.

And now he's flying again, after combat, amidst his plenteous native clouds, and the last year of his life has yet to be lived. Immensely, solitary, and exultant, he moves miles above earth in a blaze of sunshine that is his alone, denied to the October-misted land below. Then he dives and suddenly a gap appears, a vast smoky blur of buildings, in their midst a green oblong of grass and trees, that tilts and slides away, smothered by the cloud's gentle oblivion; and as he sets homeward vector for the aerodrome he has recognized that little verdant patch islanded in the London wilderness as a park that he knows well, where he met and walked with the girl who became his wife a month ago.

Time is no longer his master, for he is with her now; now he knows the sound of her laughter as the kitten chases its tail on the hearthrug before a winter fire; he walks with her on downland grass and smells the spring in a wet wind; he browses lovingly upon her loving body in a summer night and sees with her the dawnstains in the sky, both knowing the shortness of their time together and its shadow making sweeter still the moments of their delight.

But the sweet warmth fades, he is cold and in pain. Bitter is the return of consciousness. His opening eyes behold a huge night sky rich with stars. Cold and silence tomb him, and already he begins to taste the loneliness of death.

"I'm not finished yet," he cried, not hearing the faint animal noises into which the words were translated by the broken mechanism of speech. His body existed as a focus of pain; the sickening ache of his leg merged with the vague, loathsome sensations in his entrails, and the agony of his shattered jaws was fortified by the sense of physical humiliation and outrage induced by their swollen, helpless toothlessness.

But pain had not mastered him. He was able to see his lonely insignificance under the cold, star-riddled sky, and know that hope of rescue or survival was altogether vain. Tomorrow, he knew, if his injuries permitted him to survive so long, would come the heat, flies, delirium, and the sordid indignities of death by thirst. And, understanding his situation, he tried to steel himself against fear and futile hope.

Thus, he believed himself to have accepted the fact of approaching death, while still, unconsciously, he strove to utter "I'm not done for yet," a cry wrung from nerves and muscle that refused to admit their corruptibility.

Somewhere, far away in the silence, jackals howled, the sounds, shuddering into the pure, empty air like the wails of tormented lunatics. "I'm going to die," he told himself. "I'm not done for yet," he gurgled in his throat.

When, he wonders, will be the sunrise (he cold, but fears the heat), and hears the quick faint tick of his watch. Strange that it should not have been broken, he thinks, remembering how he had wound it in the morning (how long ago it seemed), and he tries to prevent himself from speculating whether it or his heart would run down first.

Slowly the stars are swinging across the sky, and he does not know if the night is at its beginning or near its end. He can only wait for the dawn, and suffer. Though the new day can mean no more for him than his last day on earth yet, since he still lives, he cannot help awaiting it with faint impatience, as if it could bring him something upon which to fasten hope. And thinking of the sunrise he suddenly remembers, from years ago, the sunrise of a long-hoped-for day, behind him an all-night journey, its fatigue washed away by gladness, all the fatigue and staleness of the journey and the whole stale, dreary period of living that lay behind him banished by the approaching moment of happiness, by the thought of a door that he would open, a room that he would enter to find her, who now lay sleeping, whose love and companionship promised to transform his life.

Momentarily more real than his pain and desolation is the memory of those London early morning streets, the green of trees in the little sooty gardens, the smells of dust, and petrol, the nostalgic London air, the familiar long, straight slope, and the diminishing perspective of houses, at whose meeting point was the house, the room, the opening door, towards which his thoughts so long had strained. He had felt extraordinary alive, and very hungry. The sky was low and threatening, and in the gardens the trees hung out a greenness that astonished him. I shall remember this moment always, he told himself.

And now recollections of those May morning trees vivid against the thundery sky and the moment of happiness realized holds back the thoughts of death; while memories begin to crowd upon him, whirling past his mental gaze like snowflakes driven before a wind.

He is twenty-six, and has lived greedily. Death, which he imagined himself to have accepted, still is not altogether real to him. In distant camps, in cities, those with whom he had shared his pleasures lie breathing and confident of their to-morrows; dew is forming in the garden of the house where he was born and in the wood-shed the sticks chopped for next week's fires stand neatly piled; behind a door whose key is in his pocket now his wife sleeps trustfully and perhaps there will be a letter from him in the morning; everything goes on exactly as it did before. "When I die the world dies with me," is his unformulated belief, and because he now perceives the world's permanence it seems impossible that he should perish.

His watch ticks; the stars wheel overhead; and in the pain-stretched silence he overhears the stealthy thudding of his heart. It is the sound of this faithful engine, which so constantly has sustained its hull of flesh in its voyage through time that begins to bring a little nearer the reality of death. Like snowflakes the memories whirled past him, insubstantial and melting as they are grasped; the body's rapture vanished as it reached his height, the moments of laughter lost as it was realized, the smile in his wife's eyes too transient to be captured. Lost, unrecapturable, never to be known again, were sunsets, the pleasures of ease and a full belly, music in the night, the slow rapturous strokes of mobile limbs mingling with the sea... everything that was cherished in the perishable tissue of his brain, so soon to rot and destroy the lovely world.

He groaned, pain wrenched at him, and the cold serpent in his entrails coiled and swelled.

Regret pours itself through him like a flood of some bitter, scalding liquid, regret for he dissolved fragilities of happiness, for all that he had had and was about to lose, for all that he might have had, for the future, for forty years of life un-lived. It is not fear after all, he thinks, that most deeply shadows these last hours, but regret... regret...

Soundlessly the world goes echoing through the bony cavern of his skull. One by one the faces of those whom he has known and loved float through his memory, like pale flowers upon dark slow flowing waters, and only one by one are swallowed up by darkness, each drowning face straining, a tender, reproachful look at him as it is engulfed.

I have lived, he thinks, as if I had an endless store of time to squander, and only now do I know how wastefully I have spent it. Regret for the past and the future is the same, for the lost moments of happiness and the loss of a particular mental climate in which friendship flourished; and certain words, looks and events made for companionable laughter; certain places, sounds, smells and weathers, coming at the same time, brought about sensations at once nostalgic and deeply satisfying.

And mourning for his loss, for his wife's grief he mourns, for her and their home and their life together, the shared moments of happiness and the mental climate in which they both could dwell at ease.

The night is nearly over. It is still dark, but in the east stars are fading. (The edge of the earth's shadow races across Africa, broad daylight and the Atlantic in its wake.) A pale, an icy luminous green trembles on the horizon, spreads, and dilutes itself with a glowing primrose at whose centre burns the halo of the yet unrisen sun.

At the surface of his body he is aware of new sensation, something that is not pain, a gentle warmth that flows caressingly over his numbed flesh. But only for a little does it soothe him. There are no morning mists, no clouds, nor tall shadows to soften the sudden heat of the disclosed sun, that begins to strike



upon him angrily. He closes his eyes, and through their lids the light glows crimson.

For hours the patrolling vultures had not seen him move; no one could tell the signs by which they knew that he still lived. Dry and hot were the feathers through which rustled and scorching air; the wild wings scarcely moved; lifeless they seemed, whose fierce life was focused into their tawny eyes that were sharp for the movement of a mouse a mile away. Now, patiently, they never ceased to watch the sprawled shape of slack flesh and fouled clothes far below.

To torment him the lifeless desert had become fertile with flies, from bare stones and barren shrubs, from the dead and sterile sand itself they seemed to issue. Malevolently buzzing they settled on his nose and mouth and eyes, rose, and settled again, crawled questingly upon each inch of exposed and shrinking flesh, with tickling feet that had dabbled in putrescence and unimaginable excrements.

The caked blood upon his face is now quite black, his swollen leg has become enormous, and his sunken eyes are ringed with dried and yellowish streaks of rheum. No one could have recognized him.

Suffering has no measurements. Beyond a certain point, however much is added no more can be felt. Flies, heat, thirst and pain were merged into a single torture of whose intensity he was hardly aware. Mostly he was in a sort of delirious stupor, his mind working in fits and starts, formulating nightmare distorted versions of its past. Then, for a little while, he would be lucid so that his mind could suffer in company with its body.

Why, he asks vainly (of nothing), why does this have to happen? Why to me, who might have lived so long and happily? A word was spoken, to a red-faced man with medals and moustache, and of my own considered choice I became a pilot. (The incentive came from things outside, the choice lay in myself alone.) Anything might have happened but each thing determined the next, from the ambition to its realization. And so I flew, and fought unscathed in battles above my own green countrysides, whose peculiar virtues I had wanted to defend. And so, each thing exactly leading to the next, I came to this desert. Also Ginger Mathieson had to be bitten by a certain mosquito in order that he should get malaria, and my name to be next to his on the duty roster. And an enemy, of whom I know nothing, put his controls to starboard instead of port and thus, accidentally, saw me before I saw him. All this followed from something long ago, and the war also, from things that at their time I did not see fateful. And now flies crawl over my gluey eyeballs, blood clogs my entrails, and minute by minute my little remaining store of life is draining away into the thirsty sand.

The sun had passed its highest point, the tiny shadow in the lee of each sand-ripple leaned the other way and began to enlarge itself. Once his outstretched hand slowly closed, then opened. An hour went by, the shadows grew a little, the hand shut again.

For a long time he had been hearing the tick of his watch, a half realized background to consciousness. Suddenly he became aware that it had stopped. He gave a convulsive movement, pain ripping at his entrails like a jagged knife. He rolled over a little, feebly turning his head from side to side and vomiting blackish blood. Then he lost consciousness altogether. A shadow slid swiftly along his body, then another, and another, as three vultures planned down and up again, between him and the sun.

At an unknown time later the sticky lids of his eyes jerked open, and he was aware that the afternoon was nearly over. Something new happened to him. He felt extraordinarily light and insubstantial; his pain seemed to come from a long way off; and the leaden congestion inside him had dwindled to a faint, weary ache. Coloured lights, like large slow-moving sparks, seemed to be drifting in front of him. It's nearly over now, he thinks, his mind working with an exhausted clarity. He remembers his anguished regrets and vain, furious questionings as if they had been part of some mental crisis through which he had passed long ago. Everyone has to die, he thinks, and it is as if he had made some great and comforting discovery. Like ghostly fireworks the coloured sparks begin to revolve around an invisible axis against the sky's aching blue.

Yes, he tells himself, to everyone this moment comes sooner or later, charged with horror and surprise, as filled with vain protest as the moment of being ripped from the womb. Yet it is not for death itself that I now grieve, but the loss of certain moments of happiness and a particular mental climate, for that which I am losing so much earlier than I had thought to, I, and not only I. For now I am not alone, on the hot sand, the frozen earth, in blooded ditches at the foot of prison walls, buried in the dusty ruins of buildings, burning alive, starving, drowning, in the cold, in rain, in mud, in darkness, under blazing suns, each choked with regret for the world he is about to lose, for happiness, and a particular mental climate in which he is at home. Also we are greedy, still hungry for the rest of our life's meal; even now, beyond all hope, as the very last crumbs of existence are being swallowed up, the still living blood and bones, the hungry nerves and unappeasable guts make their protest of defiance and, bitterly, refuse to acknowledge the corruption that awaits them.

The sun was low in the sky. Complicated shadows branched from the wrecked aircraft, and the shadows of stones, bushes, and hummocks acquired a purplish solidity that seemed more substantial than their bleached originals.

Besides the lolled head of the dying man was a little rippled rise of fine sand, strewn with small stones, amongst which parched wisps of desert weed struggled to survive. This was the limit of his vision, his whole world, and in the strange sunset light it was like a miniature of some huge and arid landscape, an exact copy of the vast scorched bowl of desert that enclosed him at its centre. This was the last scene registered at the back of his glazing eyes. Still, feebly, his heart continued to beat. He did not die suddenly; like red-hot embers beneath the ashes of a burnt-out fire some little heat of his life still lingered in his body.

But the ants, the jackals and the vultures knew when he was dead. It was not long before, beside the skeleton of the aircraft, lay the clean-picked skeleton of its pilot.

You of the cloudy future, the first to find his brittle bones, remember why he died, and be grateful.

***Questions for comprehension:***

- 1. What is the time and place of action?*
- 2. How old is the pilot? Is he married?*
- 3. How has his career begun? Was he ambitious?*
- 4. What recollections crowded upon him when he was conscious?*
- 5. Did he hope to survive? Describe the life of the desert.*
- 6. Whom is the author's appeal to in the final lines of the story?*

***Questions for discussion:***

- 1. Why doesn't the author give the name of the main character?*
- 2. Who is the story devoted to?*
- 3. Why does the author compare the crashed aircraft to a reptile?*
- 4. What is the meaning of a recurrent detail, the pilot's watch?*
- 5. Do you think that the technique of "stream of consciousness", chosen by the author, suits perfectly to describe the feelings of a dying pilot?*
- 6. Do we always pay tribute to all those fallen in wars?*

## MERCURY

*By David Herbert Lawrence*

It was Sunday, and very hot. The holiday-makers flocked to the hill of Mercury to rise two thousand feet above the steamy haze of the valleys. For the summer had been very wet, and the sudden heat covered the land in hot steam.

Every time it made the ascent, the funicular was crowded. It hauled itself up the steep incline, that towards the top looked almost perpendicular, the steel thread of the rails in the gulf of pine-trees hanging like an iron rope against a wall. The women held their breath, and didn't look. Or they looked back towards the sinking levels of the river, steamed and dim, far stretching over the frontier.

When you arrived at the top, there was nothing to do. The hill was a pine-covered cone; paths wound between the high tree-trunks, and you could walk round and see the glimpses of the world all round, all round: the dim, far river-plain, with a dull glint of the great stream, to westwards; southwards the black, forest-covered, agile-looking hills, with emerald-green clearings and a white

house or two; east, the inner valley, with two villages, factory chimneys, pointed churches, and hills beyond; and north, the steep hills of forest, with reddish crags and reddish castle ruins. The hot sun burned overhead, and all was in steam.

Only on the very summit of the hill there was a tower, an outlook tower; a long restaurant with its beer-garden, all the little yellow tables standing their round discs under the horse-chestnut trees; then a bit of a rock-garden on the slope. But the great trees began again in wilderness a few yards off.

The Sunday crowd came up in waves from the funicular. In waves they ebbed through the beer-garden. But not many sat down to drink. Nobody was spending any money. Some paid to go up the outlook tower, to look down on a world of vapours and black, agile-crouching hills, and half-cooked towns. Then everybody dispersed along the paths, to sit among the trees in the cool air.

There was not a breath of wind. Lying and looking upwards at the shaggy, barbaric middle-world of the pine-trees, it was difficult to decide whether the pure high trunks supported the upper thicket of darkness, or whether they descended from it like great cords stretched downwards. Anyhow, in between the tree-top world and the earth-world went the wonderful clean cords of innumerable proud tree-trunks, clear as rain. And as you watched, you saw that the upper world was faintly moving, faintly, most faintly swaying, with a circular movement, though the lower trunks were utterly motionless and monolithic.

There was nothing to do. In all the world, there was nothing to do, and nothing to be done. Why have we all come to the top of the Merkur? There is nothing for us to do.

What matter? We have come a stride beyond the world. Let it steam and cook its half-baked reality below there. On the hill of Mercury we take no notice. Even we do not trouble to wander and pick the fat, blue, sourish billberries. Just lie and see the rain-pure tree-trunks like cords of music between two worlds.

The hours pass by; people wander and disappear and reappear. All is hot and quiet. Humanity is rarely boisterous any more. You go for a drink; finches run among the few people at the tables; everybody glances at everybody, but with remoteness.

There is nothing to do but to return and lie down under the pine-trees. Nothing to do. But why do anything, anyhow? The desire to do anything has gone. The tree-trunks, living like rain, they are quite active enough.

At the foot of the obsolete tower there is an old tablet-stone with a very much battered Mercury, in relief. There is also an altar, votive stone, both from the Roman times. The Romans are supposed to have worshipped Mercury on the summit. The battered god, with his round sun-head, looks very hollow-eyed and unimpressive in the purplish-red sandstone of the district. And no one any more will throw grains of offering in the hollow of the votive stone: also common, purplish-red sandstone, very local and un-Roman.

The Sunday people do not even look. Why should they? They keep passing on into the pine-trees. And many sit on the benches; many lie upon the long chairs. It is very hot, in the afternoon, and very still.

Till there seems a faint whistling in the tops of the pine trees, and out of the universal semi-consciousness of the afternoon arouses a bristling uneasiness. The crowd is astir, looking at the sky. And sure enough, there is a great flat blackness reared up in the western sky, curled with white wisps and loose breast-feathers. It looks very sinister, as only the elements still can look. Under the sudden weird whistling of the upper pine trees, there is a subdued babble and calling of frightened voices.

They want to get down; the crowd wants to get down off the hill of Mercury, before the storm comes. At any price to get off the hill! They stream towards the funicular, while the sky blackens with incredible rapidity. And as the crowd presses down towards the little station, the first blaze of lightning opens out, followed immediately by a crash of thunder, and great darkness. In one strange movement, the crowd takes refuge in the deep veranda of the restaurant, pressing among the little tables in silence. There is no rain, and no definite wind, only a sudden coldness, which makes the crowd press closer.

They press closer, in the darkness and the suspense. They have become curiously unified, the crowd, as if they had fused into one body. As the air sends a chill waft under the veranda the voices murmur plaintively, like birds under leaves, the bodies press close together, seeking shelter in contact.

The gloom, dark as night, seems to continue a long time. Then suddenly the lightning dances white on the floor, dances and shakes upon the ground, up and down, and lights up the white striding of a man, lights him up only to the hips, white and naked and striding with fire on his heels. He seems to be hurrying, this fiery man whose upper half is invisible, and at his naked heels white little flames seem to flutter. His flat, powerful thighs, his legs white as fire stride rapidly across the open, in front of the veranda, dragging little white flames at the ankles, with the movement. He is going somewhere, swiftly.

In the great bang of the thunder the apparition disappears. The earth moves, and the house jumps in complete darkness. A faint whimpering of terror comes from the crowd, as the cold air swirls in. But still, upon the darkness, there is no rain. There is no relief: a long wait.

Brilliant and blinding, the lightning falls again; a strange bruising thud comes from the forest, as all the little tables and the secret tree-trunks stand for one unnatural second exposed. Then the blow of the thunder, under which the house and the crowd reel as under an explosion. The storm is playing directly upon the Merkur. A belated sound of tearing branches comes out of the forest.

And again the white splash of the lightning on the ground: but nothing moves. And again the long, rattling, instantaneous volleying of the thunder, in the darkness. The crowd is panting with fear, as the lightning again strikes white, and something again seems to burst, in the forest, as the thunder crashes.

At last, into the motionlessness of the storm, in rushes the wind, with the fiery flying of bits of ice, and the sudden sea-like roaring of the pine trees. The crowd winces and draws back, as the bits of ice hit in the face like fire. The roar of the trees is so great, it becomes like another silence. And through it is heard the crashing and splintering of timber, as the hurricane concentrates upon the hill.

Down comes the hail, in a roar that covers every other sound, threshing ponderously upon the ground and the roofs and the trees. And as the crowd surges irresistibly into the interior of the building, from the crushing of this ice-fall, still amid the sombre hoarseness sounds the tinkle and crackle of things breaking.

After an eternity of dread, it ends suddenly. Outside is a faint gleam of yellow light, over the snow and the endless debris of twigs and things broken. It is very cold, with the atmosphere of ice and deep winter. The forest looks wan, above the white earth, where the ice-balls lie in their myriads, six inches deep, littered with all twigs and things they have broken.

“Yes! Yes!” say the men, taking sudden courage as the yellow light comes into the air. “Now we can go!”

The first brave ones emerge, picking up the big hailstones, pointing to the overthrown tables. Some, however, do not linger. They hurry to the funicular station, to see if the apparatus is still working.

The funicular station is on the north side of the hill. The men come back, saying there is no more there. The crowd begins to emerge upon the wet, crunching whiteness of the hail, spreading around in curiosity, waiting for the men who operate the funicular.

On the south side of the outlook tower two bodies lay in the cold but thawing hail. The dark-blue of the uniforms showed blackish. Both men were dead. But the lightning had completely removed the clothing from the legs of one man, so he was naked from the hips down. There he lay, his face sideways on the snow, and two drops of blood running from his nose into his big, blond, military moustache. He lay there near the votive stone of the Mercury. His companion, a young man, lay face downwards, a few yards behind him.

The sun began to emerge. The crowd gazed in dread, afraid to touch the bodies of the men. Why had they, the dead funicular men, come round to this side of the hill, anyhow?

The funicular would not work. Something had happened to it in the storm. The crowd began to wind down the bear hill, on the sloppy ice. Everywhere the earth bristled with broken pine boughs and twigs. But the bushes and the leafy trees were stripped absolutely bare, to a miracle. The lower earth was leafless and naked as in winter.

“Absolute winter!” murmured the crowd, as they hurried, frightened, down the steep winding descent, extricating themselves from the fallen pine-branches.

Meanwhile the sun began to steam in great heat.

### ***Questions for comprehension:***

1. *What did the hill of Mercury look like? Why was it the tourists' attraction?*
2. *How did the holiday-makers spend their time on the top of the hill?*
3. *What were the first signs of the storm?*
4. *How strong was the thunderstorm? Describe it.*
5. *What happened to the funicular-operators?*
6. *What did the hill of Mercury look like after the storm?*

### ***Questions for discussion:***

1. *Is the problem "The Natural Elements and the Individual" urgent nowadays?*
2. *What forces did Mercury embody in ancient mythology?*
3. *What traces of worshiping this God could be found on the top of the hill?*
4. *What do contemporary scientists do to avert the possible disasters?*
5. *Can you give recent examples when people suffered from tsunamies, earthquakes, floods, tornadoes and other natural elements?*

## **THE END OF THE BEGINNING**

***By Ray Bradbury***

He stopped the lawn mower in the middle of the yard, because he felt that the sun at just that moment had gone down and the stars came out. The fresh-cut grass that had showered his face and body died softly away. Yes, the stars were there, faint at first, but brightening in the clear desert sky. He heard the porch screen door tap shut and felt his wife watching him as he watched the night.

"Almost time," she said.

He nodded; he did not have to check his watch. In the passing moments he felt very old, then very young, very cold, then very warm, now this, now that. Suddenly he was miles away. He was his own son talking steadily, moving briskly to cover his pounding heart and the resurgent panics as he felt himself slip into fresh uniform, check food supplies, oxygen flasks, pressure helmet, space-suiting, and turn as every man on earth tonight turned, to gaze at the swiftly filling sky.

Then quickly, he was back, once more the father of the son, hands gripped to the lawn-mower handle. His wife called, "Come sit on the porch."

"I've got to keep busy!"

She came down the steps and across the lawn. "Don't worry about Robert; he'll be all right."

"But it's all so new," he heard himself say, "It's never been done before. Think of it – a manned rocket going up tonight to build the first space station. Good Lord, it can't be done, it doesn't exist, there's no rocket, no proving ground no take-off time, no technicians. For that matter, I don't even have a son named Bob. The whole thing's too much for me!"

"Then what are you doing out here, staring?"

He shook his head. "Well, late this morning, walking to the office, I heard someone laugh out loud. It shocked me, so I froze in the middle of the street. It was *me*, laughing! Why? Because finally I really *knew* what Bob was going to do tonight; at last I *believed* it. Holy is a word I never use, but that's how I felt stranded in all that traffic. Then, middle of the afternoon I caught myself humming. You know the song. 'A wheel in a wheel. Way in the middle of the air.' I laughed again. The space station, of course, I thought. The big wheel with hollow spokes where Bob'll live six or eight months, then get on back.' Walking home I remembered more of a song. 'Little wheel run by faith, Big wheel run by the grace of God.' I wanted to jump, yell, and flame-out myself!"

His wife touched his arm. "If we stay out here, let's at least be comfortable."

They placed two wicker rockers in the center of the lawn and sat quietly as the stars dissolved out of darkness in pale crushings of rock salt strewn from horizon to horizon.

"Why," said his wife, at last, "it's like waiting for the fireworks at Sisley Field every year."

"Bigger crowd tonight..."

"I keep thinking... a billion people watching the sky right now, their mouths all open at the same time."

They waited feeling the earth move under their chairs.

"What time is it now?"

"Eleven minutes to eight."

"You're always right; there must be a clock in your head."

"I can't be wrong, tonight. I'll be able to tell you one second before they blast off. Look! The ten-minute warning!"

On the western sky they saw four crimson flares open out, float shimmering down the wind above the desert, then sink silently to the extinguishing earth.

In the new darkness the husband and wife did not rock in their chairs.

After a while he said, "Eight minutes." A pause. "Seven minutes." What seemed a much longer pause. "Six...."

His wife, her head back, studied the stars immediately above her and murmured, "Why?" She closed her eyes. "Why the rockets, why tonight? Why all this? I'd like to know."



He examined her face, pale in the vast powdering light of the Milky Way. He felt the stirring of an answer, but let his wife continue.

"I mean it's not that old thing again, it is, when people asked why men climbed Mt. Everest and they said, "Because it's there. I never understood. That was no answer to me."

Five minutes, he thought. Time ticking ... his wristwatch ... a wheel in a wheel ... little wheel run by ... big wheel run by ... way in the middle of ... four minutes! ... The men snug in the rocket by now, the hive, the control board flickering with light....

His lips moved.

"All I know is it's really the end of the beginning. The Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age; from now on we'll lump all those together under one big name for when we walked on Earth and heard the birds at morning and cried with envy. Maybe we'll call it the Earth Age, or maybe the Age of Gravity. Millions of years we fought gravity. When we were amoebas and fish we struggled to get out of the sea without gravity crushing us. Once safe on the shore we fought to stand upright without gravity breaking our new invention, the spine, tried to walk without stumbling, run without falling. A billion years Gravity kept us home, mocked us with wind and clouds, cabbage moths and locusts. That's what's so really big about tonight... it's the end of old man Gravity and the age we'll remember him by, for once and all. I don't know where they'll divide ages, at the Persians, who dreamt of flying carpets, or the Chinese, who all unknowing celebrated birthdays and New Years with strung ladyfingers and high skyrockets, or some minute, some incredible second in the next hour. But we are in at the end of a billion years trying, the end of something long and to us humans, anyway, honorable."

Three minutes ... two minutes fifty-nine seconds ... two minutes fifty-eight seconds....

"But," said his wife, "I still don't know why."

Two minutes, he thought. *Ready? Ready? Ready?* The far radio voice calling. *Ready! Ready! Ready!* The quick, faint replies from the humming rocket. *Check! Check! Check!*

Tonight, he thought, even if we fail with this first, we'll send a second and a third ship and move on to all the planets and later, all the stars. We'll just keep going until the big words like immortal and forever take on meaning. Big words, yes, that's what we want. Continuity. Since our tongues first moved in our mouths we've asked, What does it all mean? No other question made sense, with death breathing down our necks. But just let us settle in on ten thousand worlds spinning around ten thousand alien suns and the question will fade away. Man will be endless and infinite, even as space is endless and infinite. Man will go on, as space goes on, forever. Individuals will die as always, but our history will reach as far as we'll ever need to see into the future, and with the knowledge of our survival for all time to come, we'll know security and

thus the answer we've always searched for. Gifted with life, the least we can do is preserve and pass on the gift to infinity. That's a goal worth shooting for.

The wicker chairs whispered ever so softly on the grass.

One minute.

"One minute," he said aloud.

"Oh!" His wife moved suddenly to seize his hands. "I hope that Bob...."

"He'll be all right!"

"Oh, God, take care...."

Thirty seconds.

"Watch now."

Fifteen, ten, five.... "Watch!" Four, three, two, one.

"There! There! Oh, there, there!"

They both cried out. They both stood. The chairs toppled back, fell flat on the lawn. The man and his wife swayed their hands struggled to find each other, grip, hold. They saw the brightening color in the sky and ten seconds later the great uprising comet burn the air, put out the stars, and rush away in fire flight to become another star in the returning profusion of the Milky Way. The man and wife held each other as if they had stumbled on the rim of an incredible cliff that faces an abyss so deep and dark there seemed no end to it. Staring up, they heard themselves sobbing and crying. Only after a long time were they able to speak.

"It's got away, it did, *didn't* it?"

"Yes...."

"It's all right, isn't it?"

"Yes ... yes...."

"It didn't fall back....?"

"No, no, it's all right, Bob's all right, it's all right."

They stood away from each other at last.

He touched his face with his hand and looked at his wet fingers. "I'll be," he said, "I'll be...."

They waited another five and then ten minutes until the darkness in their heads, the retina, ached with a million specks of fiery salt. Then they had to close their eyes.

"Well," she said, "now let's go in."

— He could not move. Only his hand reached a long way out by itself to find the lawn-mower handle. He saw what his hand had done and said, "There's just a little more to do...."

"But you can't see."

"Well enough," he said. "I must finish this. Then we'll sit on the porch awhile before we turn in."

He helped her put the chairs on the porch and sat her down and then walked back out to put his hands on the guide bar of the lawn mower. The lawn mower. A wheel in a wheel. A simple machine which you held in your hands,

which you sent on ahead with a rush and a clatter while you walked behind with your quiet philosophy. Racket, followed by warm silence. Whirling wheel, then soft football of thought.

I am a billion years old, he told himself; I'm one minute old. I'm one inch, no, ten thousand *miles*, tall. I look down and can't see my feet they're so far off and gone away below.

He moved the lawn mower. The grass showering up fell softly around him; he relished and savored it and felt that he was all mankind bathing at last in the fresh waters of the fountain of youth.

Thus bathed, he remembered the song again about the wheels and the faith and the grace of God being way up there in the middle of the sky where that single star, among a million motionless stars, dared to move and keep on moving.

Then he finished cutting the grass.

***Questions on comprehension:***

- 1. What is the time of action?*
- 2. What are the two main characters waiting for?*
- 3. What does their son do?*
- 4. Is the space flight a success?*

***Questions for discussion:***

- 1. What feelings have the parents experienced more: pride or fear?*
- 2. Why can't the progress of civilization be stopped?*
- 3. Is it natural that the parents are always anxious about their even grown-up children?*
- 4. How does the author convey the father's relief?*

## THE ANGEL CHILD

**By Stephen Crane (1871-1900)**

Although Whilomville was in no sense a summer resort, the advent of the warm season meant much to do, for then came visitors from the city—people of considerable confidence—alighting upon their country cousins. Moreover, many citizens who could afford to do so escaped at this time to the seaside. The town, with the commercial life quite taken out of it, drawled and drowsed through long months, during which nothing was worse than the white dust, which arose behind every vehicle at blinding noon, and nothing was finer than the cool sheen of the hose sprays over the cropped lawns under the many maples in the twilight.

One summer the Trescotts had a visitation. Mrs. Trescott owned a cousin who was a painter of high degree. I had almost said that he was of national

reputation, but come to think of it, it is better to say that almost everybody in the United States who knew about art and its travail knew about him. He had picked out a wife, and naturally, looking at him, one wondered how he had done it. She was quick, beautiful, imperious, while he was quiet, slow, and misty. She was a veritable queen of health, while he, apparently, was of a most brittle constitution. When he played tennis, particularly, he looked every minute as if he were going to break.

They lived in New York in awesome apartments wherein Japan and Persia, and indeed all the world, confounded the observer. At the end was a cathedral-like studio. They had one child. Perhaps it would be better to say that they had one CHILD. It was a girl. When she came to Whilomville with her parents, it was patent that she had an inexhaustible store of white frocks, and that her voice was high and commanding. These things the town knew quickly. Other things it was doomed to discover by a process.

Her effect upon the children of the Trescott neighborhood was singular. They at first feared, then admired, then embraced. In two days she was a begum. All day long her voice could be heard directing, drilling and compelling those free-born children; and to say that they felt oppression would be wrong, for they really fought for records of loyal obedience.

All went well until one day was her birthday.

On the morning of this day, she walked out into the Trescott garden and said to her father confidently, "Papa, give me some money, because this is my birthday."

He looked dreamily up from his easel. "Your birthday?" he murmured. Her envisioned father was never energetic enough to be irritable unless someone broke through into that place where he lived with the desires of his life. But neither wife nor child ever heeded or even understood the temperamental values, and so more part of him had grown hardened to their inroads. "Money" he said. "Here." He handed her a five-dollar bill. It was not that he did not at all understand the nature of a five-dollar bill. He was deaf to it. He had it; he gave it; that was all.

She sallied forth to a waiting people—Jimmy Trescott, Dan Earl, Ella Earl, the Margate twins, the three Phelps children, and others. "I've got some pennies now," she cried, waving the bill, "and I am going to buy some candy." They were deeply stirred by this announcement. Most children are penniless three hundred days in the year. And to another possessing five pennies they pay deference. To little Cora waving a bright-green note these children paid heathenish homage. In some disorder they thronged after her to a small shop in Bridge Street hill. First of all came ice cream. Seated in the comic little back parlor, they clamored shrilly over plates of various flavors, and the shopkeeper marveled that cream could vanish so quickly down throats that seemed wide open, always, for the making of excited screams.

These children represented the families of most excellent people. They were all born in whatever purple there was to be had in the vicinity of Whilomville. The Margate twins for a example, were out-and-out prize-winners. With their long, golden curls and their countenances of similar vacuity, they shone upon the front bench of all Sunday-school functions, hand in hand, while their uplifted mother felt about her the envy of a hundred other parents, and the less heavenly children scoffed from near the door.

Then there was little Dan Earl, probably the nicest boy in the world, gentle, fine-grained, obedient to the point where he obeyed anybody. Jimmy Trescott himself was, indeed, the only child who was at all versed in villainy, but in these particular days he was on his very good behavior. As a matter of fact, he was in love. The beauty of his little regal cousin had stolen his manly heart.

Yes, they were all most excellent children, but, loosened upon this candy shop with five dollars, they resembled, in a tiny way, drunken, reveling soldiers within the walls of a stormed city. Upon the heels of ice cream and cake came chocolate mice, butterscotch, "everlastings," chocolate cigars, taffy-on-a-stick, taffy-on-a-slate-pencil, and many semitransparent devices resembling lions, tigers, elephants, horses, cats, dogs, cows, sheep, tables, chairs, engines (both railway and for the fighting of fire), soldiers, fine ladies, odd-looking men, clocks, watches, revolvers, rabbits, and bedsteads. A cent was the price of a single wonder.

Some of the children, going quite daft, soon had thought to make fight over the spoils, but their queen ruled with an iron grip. Her first aspiration was to satisfy her own fancies, but as soon as that was done, she mingled prodigality with a fine justice, dividing, balancing, bestowing, and sometimes taking away from somebody even that which he had.

It was an orgy. In thirty-five minutes, those respectable children looked as if they had been dragged at the tail of a chariot. The sacred Margate twins, blinking and grunting, wished to take seat upon the floor, and even the most durable Jimmy Trescott found occasion to lean against the counter, wearing at the time a solemn and abstracted air, as if he expected something to happen to him shortly.

Of course their belief had been in an unlimited capacity, but they found there was an end. The shopkeeper handed the queen her change.

"Two seventy-three from five leaves two twenty-seven, Miss Cora," he said looking upon her with admiration. She turned swiftly to the clan. "O-oh!" she cried, in amazement. "Look how much I have left!" They gazed at the coins in her palm. They knew then that it was not their capacities which were endless; it was the five dollars.

The queen led the way to the street. "We must think up some way of spending more money," she said, frowning. They stood in silence, awaiting her further speech.

Suddenly she clapped her hands and screamed with delight. "Come on!" she cried. "I know what let's do." Now behold, she had discovered the red-and-white pole in front of the shop of one William Neeltje, a barber by trade.

It becomes necessary to say a few words concerning a dusty little shop on dusty Bridge Street hill, and although the neighborhood knew from the courier winds that his diet was mainly cabbage, they were satisfied with that meager data. Of course Reifsnnyder came to investigate him for the local Barbers' Union, but he found in him only sweetness and light, with a willingness to charge any price at all for a shave or a haircut. In fact, the advent of Neeltje would have made barely a ripple upon the placid bosom of Whilomville if it were not that his name was Neeltje.

At first the people looked at his signboard out of the eye corner, and wondered lazily why anyone should bear the name of Neeltje; but as time went on, men spoke to other men, saying, "How do you pronounce the name of that barber up there on Bridge Street hill?" And then, before any could prevent it, the best minds of the town were splintering their lances against William Neeltje's signboard. If a man had a mental superior, he guided him seductively to this name, and watched with glee his wrecking. The clergy of the town even entered the list. There was one among them who had taken a collegiate prize in Syriac, as well as in several less opaque languages, and the other clergymen- at one of their weekly meetings-sought to betray him into this ambush. He pronounced the name correctly, but that mattered little, since none of them knew whether he did or did not; and so they took triumph according to their ignorance. Under these arduous circumstances, it was certain that the town should look for a nickname, and at this time the nickname was in process of formation. So William Neeltje lived on with his secret, smiling foolishly towards the world.

"Come on," cried little Cora. "Let's all get our hair cut. That's what let's do. Let's all get our hair cut! Come on! Come on! Come on!" The others were carried off their feet by the fury of this assault. To get their hair cut! What joy! Little did they know if this were fun; they only knew that their small leader said it was fun. Chocolate-stained but confident, the band marched into William Neeltje's barber shop.

"We wish to get our hair cut," said little Cora haughtily.

Neeltje, in his shirt sleeves, stood looking at them with his half-idiot smile.

"Hurry now!" commanded the queen. A dray horse toiled step by step, step by step, up Bridge Street hill; a far woman's voice arose; there could be heard the ceaseless hammers of shingling carpenters; all was summer peace. "Come on, now. Who's goin' first? Come on Ella; you go first. Gettin' our hair cut! Oh, What fun!"

Little Ella Earl would not, however, be first in the chair. She was drawn towards it by a singular fascination, but at the same time she was afraid of it, and so she was hung back, saying, "No, you go first!" The question was precipitated by the twins and one of the Phelps children. They made a simultaneous rush for

the chair, and screamed and kicked, each pair preventing the third child. The queen entered this melee, and decided in favor of the Phelps boy. He ascended the chair. Thereat an awed silence fell upon the band. And always William Neeltje smiled fatuously.

He tucked a cloth in the neck of the Phelps boy, and taking scissors, began to cut his hair. The group of children came closer and closer. Even the queen was deeply moved. "Does it hurt any?" she asked, in a wee voice.

"Naw," said the Phelps boy with dignity. "Anyhow, I've had m' hair cut afore."

When he appeared to them looking very soldiery with his cropped little head, there was a tumult over the chair. The Margate twins howled; Jimmy Trescott was kicking them on the shins. It was a fight.

But the twins could not prevail, being the smallest of all the children. The queen herself took the chair, and ordered Neeltje as if he were a lady's maid. To the floor there fell proud ringlets, blazing even there in their humiliation with a full, fine bronze light. Then Jimmy Trescott, then Ella Earl (two long, ash-colored plaits), then a Phelps girl, then another Phelps girl; and so on from head to head. The ceremony received unexpected check when the turn came to Dan Earl. This lad, usually docile to any rein, had suddenly grown mulishly obstinate. No, he would not, he would not. He himself did not seem to know why he refused to have his hair cut, but despite the shrill derision of the company, he remained obdurate. Anyhow, the twins, long held in check, and now feverishly eager, were already struggling for the chair.

And so to the floor at last came the golden Margate curls, the heart treasure and glory of a mother, three aunts, and some feminine cousins.

All having been finished, the children, highly elate, thronged out into the street. They crowed and cackled with pride and joy, anon turning to scorn to cowardly Dan Earl.

Ella Earl was an exception. She had been pensive for some time, and now the shorn little maiden began vaguely to weep. In the door of his shop William Neeltje stood watching them, upon his face a grin of almost inhuman idiocy.

It now becomes the duty of the unfortunate writer to exhibit these children to their fond parents. "Come on, Jimmy," cried little Cora, "let's go show Mamma." And they hurried off, these happy children, to show Mamma.

The Trescotts and their guests were assembled, indolently awaiting the luncheon bell. Jimmy and the angel child burst in upon them. "Oh, Mamma," shrieked little Cora, "see how fine I am! I've had my hair cut! Isn't it splendid? And Jimmy, too!"

The wretched mother took one sight, emitted one yell, and fell into a chair. Mrs. Trescott dropped a large lady's journal and made a nerveless, mechanical clutch at it. The painter gripped the arms of his chair and leaned forward, staring until his eyes were like two little clock faces. Dr. Trescott did not move or speak.

To the children the next moments were chaotic. There was a loudly wailing mother, and a pale-faced, aghast mother; a stammering father, and a grim and terrible father. The angel child did not understand anything of it save the voice of calamity, and in a moment all her little imperialism went to the winds. She ran sobbing to her mother. "Oh, Mamma! Mamma! Mamma!"

The desolate Jimmy heard out of this inexplicable situation a voice, which he knew well, a sort of colonel's voice, and he obeyed like any good soldier. "Jimmy!"

He stopped three paces to the front. "Yes, sir?"

"How did this happen?" said Trescott.

Now Jimmy could have explained how had happened anything which had happened, but he did not know what had happened, so he said, "I-I-nothin'."

"And, oh, look at her frock!" said Mrs. Trescott brokenly.

The words turned the mind of the mother of the angel child. She looked up, her eyes blazing. "Frock!" she repeated. "Frock! What do I care for her frock? Frock!" she choked out again from the depth of her bitterness. Then she arose suddenly, and whirled tragically upon her husband. "Look!" she declaimed. "All - her lovely - hair-all her lovely hair-gone-gone!" The painter was apparently in a fit; his jaw was set, his eyes were glazed, his body was stiff and straight. "All gone-all-her lovely hair-all gone- my poor little darlin'!" And the angel child added her heartbroken voice to her mother's wail as they fled into each other's arms.

In the meantime, Trescott was patiently unraveling some skeins of Jimmy's tangled intellect. "And then you went to this barber's on the hill. Yes. And where did you get the money? Yes. I see. And who besides you and Cora had their hair cut? The Margate twi- Oh, Lord!"

Over at the Margate place, old Eldridge Margate, the grandfather of the twins, was in the back garden picking peas and smoking ruminatively to himself. Suddenly he heard from the house great noises. Doors slammed, women rushed upstairs and downstairs calling to each other in voices of agony. And then, full and mellow upon the still air, arose the roar of the twins in pain.

Old Eldridge stepped out of the pea patch and moved towards the house, puzzled, staring, not yet having decided that it was his duty to rush forward. Then around the corner of the house shot his daughter Mollie, her face pale with horror.

"What's the matter?" he cried.

"Oh, father," she gasped, "the children! They--"

Then around the corner of the house came the twins, howling at the top of their power, their faces flowing with tears. They were still hand in hand, the ruling passion being strong even in the suffering. At sight of them, old Eldridge took his pipe hastily out of his mouth. "Good God!" he said.



And now what befell one William Neeltje, a barber by trade? And what was said by angry parents of the mother of such an angel child? And what was the fate of the angel child herself?

There was surely a tempest. With the exception of the Margate twins, the boys could well be eliminated from the affair. Of course it didn't matter if their hair was cut. Also the two little Phelps girls had had very short hair, anyhow, and their parents were not too greatly incensed. In the case of Ella Earl, it was mainly the pathos of the little girl's own grieving, but her mother played a most generous part, and called upon Mrs. Trescott, and condoled with the mother of the angel child over their equivalent losses. But the Margate contingent! They simply screeched.

Trescott, composed and cold-blooded, was in the middle of a giddy whirl. He was not going to allow the mobbing of his wife's cousins, nor was he going to pretend that the spoliation of the Margate twins was a virtuous and beautiful act. He was elected, gratuitously, to the position of a buffer.

But curiously enough, the one who achieved the bulk of the misery was old Eldridge Margate, who been picking pease at the time. The feminine Margates stormed his position as individuals, in pairs, in teams, and en masse. In two days they may have aged him seven years. He must destroy the utter Neeltje. He must midnightly massacre the angel child and her mother. He must deep his arms in blood to the elbows.

Trescott took the first opportunity to express to him his concern over the affair, but when the subject of the disaster was mentioned, old Eldridge, to the doctor's great surprise, actually chuckled long and deeply. "Oh, well, look-a-here," he said. "I never was so much in love with them their damn curls. The curls was purty-yes-but then I'd a darn sight rather see boys look more like boys than like two little wax figgers. An', ye know, the little cusses like it themselves. *They* never took no stock in all this washin' an' combin' an' fixin an' goin' to church an' paradin' an' showin' off. They stood it because they were told to. That's all. Of course this here Neel-t-gee, er whatever his name is, is a plumb, dumb ijit, but I don't see what's to be done, now that the kids is full well cropped. I might go and burn his shop over his head, but that won't bring us no hair back onto the kids. They're even kicking on sashes now, and that's all right, 'cause what fer does a boy want a sash? "

Whereupon Trescott perceived that the old man wore his brains above his shoulders, and Trescott departed from him rejoicing greatly that it was only women who could not know that there was finally to most disasters, and that when a thing was fully done, no amount of door-slamming, rushing upstairs and downstairs, calls, lamentations, tears, could bring back a single hair to the heads of twins.

But the rains came and the winds blew in the most biblical way when a certain fact came to light in the Trescott household. Little Cora corroborated by Jimmy, innocently remarked that five dollars had been given her by her father on

her birthday, and with this money the evil had been wrought. Trescott had known it, but he—thoughtful man—had said nothing. For her part, the mother of the angel child had up to that moment never reflected that the consummation of the wickedness must have cost a small sum of money. But now it was all clear to her. He was the guilty one—he! “My angel child!”

The scene that ensued was inspiring. A few days later, loungers at the railway stations saw a lady leading a shorn and still undaunted lamb. Attached to them was a husband and father, who was plainly bewildered, but still more plainly vexed, as if he would be saying: “Damn ‘em! Why can’t they leave me alone?”

*Stephen Crane was born in 1871 the fourteenth child the Reverend Jonathan Townley Crane, a Methodist minister. When Stephen was nine his father died. Stephen Crane achieved enormous celebrity during his short and feverish life as a short-story writer. He died at the age of 28 in 1900. Called “the chief impressionist of the age,” he wrote sensitive, realistic stories that have made him a classic figure in American literature.*

*Questions for discussion:*

- 1. Do you think that it is a kind of subconscious challenge of a child to her parents who forgot about her birthday?*
- 2. How is the theme ‘the children-are-a-race-apart’ developed in this story?*
- 3. How can you account for the title of the story?*

## THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER WITTY

*By James Thurber*

“We’re going through!” The Commander’s voice was like thin ice breaking. He wore his full-dress uniform, with the heavily braided white cap pulled down rakishly over one cold gray eye. “We can’t make it, sir. It’s spoiling for a hurricane, if you ask me.” “I’m not asking you, Lieutenant Berg,” said the Commander. “Throw on the power lights! Rev her up to 8,500! We’re going through!” The pounding of the cylinders increased: ta-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa. The Commander stared at the ice forming on the pilot window. He walked over and twisted a row of complicated dials. “Switch on No. 8 auxiliary!” he shouted. “Switch on No. 8 auxiliary!” repeated Lieutenant Berg. “Full strength in No. 3 turret!” shouted the Commander. “Full strength in No. 3 turret!” The crew, bending to their various tasks in the huge, hurtling eight-engined Navy hydroplane, looked at each other and grinned. “The Old Man’ll get us through,” they said to one another. “The Old Man ain’t afraid of Hell!”...

“Not so fast! You ‘re driving too fast!” said Mrs. Mitty. “What are you driving so fast for?”

“Hmm?” said Walter Mitty. He looked at his wife, in the seat beside him, with shocked astonishment. She seemed grossly unfamiliar, like a strange woman who had yelled at him in a crowd. “You were up to fifty-five,” she said. “You know I don’t like to go more than forty. You were up to fifty-five.” Walter Mitty drove on toward Waterbury in silence, the roaring of the SN202 through the worst storm in twenty years of Navy flying fading in the remote, intimate airways of his mind. “You’re tensed up again,” said Mrs. Mitty. “It’s one of your days I wish you’d let Dr. Renshaw look you over.”

Walter Mitty stopped the car in front of the building where his wife went to have her hair done. “Remember to get those overshoes while I’m having my hair done,” she said. “I don’t need overshoes,” said Mitty. She put her mirror into her bag. “We’ve been all through that,” she said, getting out of the car. “You’re not a young man any longer.” He raced the engine a little. “Why don’t you wear your gloves? Have you lost your gloves?” Walter Mitty reached in a pocket and brought out the gloves. He put them on, but after she had turned and gone into the building and he had driven on to a red light, he took them off again. “Pick it up, brother!” snapped a cop as the light changed, and Mitty hastily put on his gloves and lurched ahead. He drove around the streets aimlessly for a time, and then he drove past the hospital on his way to the parking lot.

... “It’s the millionaire banker, Wellington McMillan,” said the pretty nurse. “Yes?” said Walter Mitty, removing his gloves slowly. “Who has the case?” “Dr. Renshaw and Dr. Benbow, but there are two specialists here, Dr. Remington from New York and Dr. Pritchard-Mitford from London. He flew over!” A door opened down a long cool corridor and Dr. Renshaw came out. He looked distraught and haggard. “Hello, Mitty,” he said. “We’re having the devil’s own time with McMillan, the millionaire banker and close personal friend of Roosevelt. Obstreosis of the ductal tract. Tertiary.<sup>1</sup> Wish you’d take a look at him.” “Glad to,” said Mitty.

In the operating room there were whispered introductions: “Dr. Remington, Dr. Mitty. Dr. Pritchard-Mitford, Dr. Mitty.” “I’ve read your book on streptothricosis,” said Pritchard-Mitford, shaking hands. “A brilliant performance, sir...” “Thank you,” said Walter Mitty. “Didn’t know you were in the states, Mitty,” grumbled Remington. “Coals to Newcastle, bringing Mitford and me up here for a tertiary.” “You are very kind,” said Mitty. A huge, complicated machine, connected to the operating table, with many tubes and wires, began at this moment to go pocketa-pocketa-pocketa. “The new anesthetizer is giving way!” shouted an intern. “There is no one in the East who knows how to fix it!” “Quiet, man!” said Mitty, in a low, cool voice. He sprang to the machine, which was now going pocketa-pocketa-queep-pocketa-queep.

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<sup>1</sup> **obstreosis ... Tertiary:** nonsensical diagnosis indicating that some details of Mitty’s dreams are imaginary.

He began fingering delicately a row of glistening dials. "Give me a fountain pen!" he snapped. Someone handed him a fountain pen. He pulled a faulty piston out of the machine and inserted the pen in its place. "That will hold for ten minutes," he said. "Get on with the operation." A nurse hurried over and whispered to Renshaw, and Mitty saw the man turn pale. "Coreopsis has set in," said Renshaw nervously. "If you would take over, Mitty?" Mitty looked at him and at the craven figure of Ben-bow, who drank, and at the grave, uncertain faces of the two great specialists. "If you wish," he said. They slipped a white gown on him; he adjusted a mask and drew on thin gloves; nurses handed him shining...

"Back it up, Mac! Look out for that Buick!" Walter Mitty jammed on the brakes. "Wrong lane, Mac," said the parking-lot attendant, looking at Mitty closely. "Gee. Yeh," muttered Mitty. He began cautiously to back out of the lane marked "Exit Only." "Leave her sit there," said the attendant. "I'll put her away." Mitty got out of the car. "Hey, better leave the key." "Oh," said Mitty, handing the man the ignition key. The attendant vaulted into the car, backed it up with insolent skill, and put it where it belonged.

They are so cocky, thought Walter Mitty, walking along Main Street; they think they know everything. Once he tried to take his chains off, outside New Milford, and he had got them wound around the axles. A man had had to come out in a wrecking car and unwind them, a young, grinning garageman. Since then Mrs. Mitty always made him drive to a garage to have the chains taken off. The next time, he thought, I'll wear my right arm in a sling and they'll see I couldn't possibly take the chains off myself. He kicked at the slush on the sidewalk. "Overshoes," he said to himself, and he began looking for a shoe store.

When he came out into the street again, with the overshoes in a box under his arm, Walter Mitty began to wonder what the other thing was his wife had told him to get. She told him twice before they set out from their house for Waterbury. In a way he hated these weekly trips to town- he was always getting something wrong. Kleenex, he thought, Squibb's, razor blades? No. Toothpaste, toothbrush, bicarbonate, carborundum, initiative and referendum? He gave it up. But she would remember it. "Where's the what's-its-name?" she would ask. "Don't tell me you forgot the what's-its-name." A newsboy went by shouting something about the Waterbury trial.

..."Perhaps this will refresh your memory." The District Attorney suddenly thrust a heavy automatic at the quiet figure on the witness stand. "Have you ever seen this before?" Walter Mitty took the gun and examined it expertly. "This is my Webley-Vickers 50.80," he said calmly. An excited buzz ran about the courtroom. The Judge rapped for order. "You are a crack shot with any sort of firearms, I believe?" said the District Attorney, insinuatingly. "Objections!" shouted Mitty's attorney. We have shown that the defendant could not have fired the shot. We have shown that he wore his right arm in a sling on the night of the

fourteenth of July.” Walter Mitty raised his hand briefly and the bickering attorneys were stilled. “With any known make of gun,” he said evenly, “I could have killed Gregory Fitzhurst at three hundred feet with my left hand.” Pandemonium broke loose in the courtroom. A woman’s scream rose above the bedlam and suddenly a lovely, dark-haired girl was in Walter Mitty’s arms. The District Attorney struck at her savagely. Without rising from his chair, Mitty let the man have it on the point of the chin. “Yo“ miserable cur!” ...

“Puppy biscuit,” said Walter Mitty. He stopped walking and the buildings of Waterbury rose up out of the misty courtroom and surrounded him again. A woman who was passing laughed. “He said ‘Puppy biscuit,’” she said to her companion. “That man said ‘Puppy biscuit’ to himself.” Walter Mitty hurried on. He went into an A & P, not the first one he came to but a smaller one farther up the street. “I want some biscuit for small, young dogs,” he said to the clerk. “Any special brand, sir?” The greatest pistol shot in the world thought a moment. “It says ‘Puppies Bark for It’ on the box,” said Walter Mitty.

His wife would be through at the hairdresser’s in fifteen minutes, Mitty saw in looking at his watch, unless they had trouble drying it; sometimes they had trouble drying it. She didn’t like to get to the hotel first; she would want him to be there waiting for her as usual. He found a big leather chair in the lobby, facing a window, and he put the overshoes and the puppy biscuit on the floor beside it. He picked up an old copy of *Liberty* and sank down into the chair. “Can Germany Conquer the World Through the Air?” Walter Mitty looked at the pictures of bombing planes and of ruined streets.

...“The cannonading has got the wind up in young Raleigh, sir,” said the sergeant. Captain Mitty looked up at him through tousled hair. “Get him to bed,” he said wearily, “with the others. I’ll fly alone.” “But you can’t, sir,” said the sergeant anxiously. “It takes two men to handle that bomber and the Archies<sup>1</sup> are pounding hell out of the air. Von Richtman’s circus<sup>2</sup> is between here and Saulier.” “Somebody’s got to get that ammunition dump,” said Mitty. “I’m going over. Spot of brandy?” He poured a drink for the sergeant and one for himself. War thundered and whined around the dugout and battered at the door. There was a rending of wood and splinters flew through the room. “A bit of a near thing,” said Captain Mitty carelessly. “The box barrage is closing in,” said the sergeant. “We only live once, Sergeant,” said Mitty, with his faint, fleeting smile. “Or do we?” He poured another brandy and tossed it off. “I never see a man could hold his brandy like you, sir,” said the sergeant. “Begging your pardon, sir.” Captain Mitty stood up and strapped on his huge Webley-Vickers automatic. “It’s forty kilometers through hell, sir,” said the sergeant. Mitty finished one last brandy. “After all,” he said softly, “what isn’t?” The pounding of the cannon increased; there was the rat-tat-tatting of machine guns, and from somewhere came the menacing pocketa-pocketa-pock-

<sup>1</sup> **Arhies:** slang for anti-aircraft guns during World War I.

<sup>2</sup> **circus:** squadron of fighter planes in formation.

eta of the new flame-throwers. Walter Mitty walked to the door of the dugout humming “Aupres de Ma Blonde.” He turned and waved to the sergeant. “Cheerio!” he said. . . .

Something struck his shoulder. “I’ve been looking all over this hotel for you,” said Mrs. Mitty. “Why do you have to hide in this old chair? How did you expect me to find you?” “Things close in,” said Walter Mitty vaguely. “What?” Mrs. Mitty said. “Did you get the what’s-its-name? The puppy biscuit? What’s in that box?” “Overshoes,” said Mitty. “Couldn’t you have put them on in the store?” “I was thinking,” said Walter Mitty. “Does it ever occur to you that I am sometimes thinking?” She looked at him. “I’m going to take your temperature when I get you home,” she said.

They went out through the revolving doors that made a faintly derisive whistling sound when you pushed them. It was two blocks to the parking lot. At the drugstore on the corner she said, “Wait here for me. I forgot something. I won’t be a minute.” She was more than a minute. Walter Mitty lighted a cigarette. It began to rain, rain with sleet in it. He stood up against the wall of the drugstore, smoking . . . He put his shoulders back and his heels together. “To hell with the handkerchief,” said Walter Mitty scornfully. He took one last drag on his cigarette and snapped it away. Then, with that faint, fleeting smile playing about his lips, he faced the firing squad; erect and motionless, proud and disdainful, Walter Mitty the Undefeated, inscrutable to the last.

### ***Questions on comprehending:***

- 1. Name the characters Mitty imagines himself to be. Describe the situations he creates for each of those characters.*
- 2. Mitty drives past a hospital and imagines that he is a surgeon. What other situations lead Mitty into other dreams?*
- 3. Give examples of how Mitty is suddenly roused from his dreams.*

### ***Questions for discussion:***

- 1. What personality traits does Mitty possess in his dreams?*
- 2. Compare the way Mitty is treated by people in his dreams with the way he is actually treated in his real life.*
- 3. Explain two methods by which Thurber makes the story humorous.*
- 4. How would you describe a “Walter Mitty type”? In what ways is the character of Walter Mitty a recognizable and well-known human type?*

## THE TELL-TALE HEART

By Edgar Poe (1809-1849)

True! – nervous – very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses – nor destroyed – not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! And observe how healthy – how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture – a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees – very gradually – I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen *me*. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded – with what caution – with what foresight – with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it – oh, so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly – very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within an opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! – would a madman have been so wise as this? And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously – oh, so cautiously – cautiously (for the hinges creaked) – I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did for seven long nights – every night just at midnight – but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch's minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night had I *felt* the extent of my own powers – of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly

chuckled of the idea; and perhaps he heard me; for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back – but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers), and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.

I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in bed, crying out – “Who’s there?”

I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening--just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death – watches in the wall.

Presently I heard a slight groan of pain or of grief – oh, no! – it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it was welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but he could not. He had been saying to himself, “It is nothing but the wind in the chimney – it is only a mouse crossing the floor,” or “It is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp.” Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain. *All in vain*; because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel – although he neither saw nor heard – *to feel* the presence of my head within the room. When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little—a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it – you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily--until, at length, a simple dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell full upon the vulture eye.

It was open – wide, wide open--and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness – all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man’s face or person: for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, perfectly upon the spot.

And have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but overacuteness of the senses? – now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew *that* sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man’s heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime



the hellish tattoo of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror *must* have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment! – do you mark me well? I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained and stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me—the sound would be heard by a neighbour! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once – once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon his heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

If you still think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye – not even *Ms* – could have detected anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out – no stain of any kind – no blood spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all – ha! ha!

When I had made an end of these labors, it was four o'clock – still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking in the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart, for what had I *now* to fear? There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.

I smiled, for *what* had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitor all over the house. I bade them search – search *well*. I led them, at length, to *his* chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them *here* to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.

The officers were satisfied. My *manner* had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone.

My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears; but still they sat and still chattered. The ringing became more distinct – it continued and became more distinct; I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling; but it continued and gained definiteness – until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears.

No doubt, I now grew *very* pale – but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased – and what could I do? It was a *low, dull, quick sound – much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton*. I gasped for breath – and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly – more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why *would* they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men – but the noise steadily increased. Oh, what *could* I do? I foamed – I raved – I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder – louder – *louder!* And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? No, no! They heard! – they suspected – they *knew!* – they were making a *mockery* of my horror – this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! – and now – again! – hark! louder! louder! louder! *louder!* –

“*Villains!*” I shrieked, “dissemble no more! I admit the deed! – tear up the planks! – here, here! – it is the beating of his hideous heart!”

### ***Questions on comprehending:***

1. *At the beginning of the story, what reason does the narrator give for his nervous condition?*
2. *Describe in detail what disturbs the narrator about the old man?*
3. *What details of his caution does the narrator give as evidence of his sanity?*
4. *When and how does the narrator finally commits his crime?*
5. *Give two examples of the narrator's confidence with the police. Why does he finally confess?*

### ***Questions for discussion:***

1. *In spite of his claims and cautious behavior, the narrator acts in an increasingly frenzied manner. What do his movements tell us about his state of mind?*
2. *Explain how the narrator's supposedly sharpened sense of hearing contributes to the murder and to the narrator's confession. What might he actually be hearing in each instance? Why?*

3. Explain how the repeated mention of the narrator's sensitivity to the eye, the scream, and the heartbeat increases the mood of horror in the story.

4. The narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" insists on his own sanity, but much of the proof he offers is actually proof that he is mad. Give examples of his own arguments that prove him insane.

5. Because of the first-person point of view, we are given a partial view of the story. Explain what is revealed about the characters and events of 'The Tell-Tale Heart' by the narrator. Then explain what is not revealed.

## THE LAST TEA

*By Dorothy Parker (1893-1967)*

The young man in the chocolate-brown suit sat down at the table, where the girl with the artificial camellia had been sitting for forty minutes.

"Guess I must be late," he said. "Sorry you been waiting."

"Oh, goodness!" she said. "I just got here myself, just about a second ago, I simply went ahead and ordered because I was dying for a cup of tea. I was late myself. I haven't been here more than a minute."

"That's good," he said. "Hey, hey, easy on the sugar – one lump is fair enough. And take away those cakes. Terrible! Do I feel terrible!"

"Ah," she said, "you do? Ah. Whadda matter?"

"Oh, I'm ruined," he said. "I'm in terrible shape."

"Ah, the poor boy," she said. "Was it feeln' mizzable? Ah, and it came way up here to meet me! You shouldn't have done that – I'd have understood. Ah, just think of it coming all the way up here when it's so sick!"

"Oh, that's all right," he said. "I might as well be here as any place else. Any place is like any other place, the way I feel today. Oh, I'm all shot."

"Why, that's just awful," she said. "Why, you poor sick thing. Goodness, I hope it isn't influenza. They say there's a lot of it around."

"Influenza!" he said. "I wish that was all I had. Oh, I'm poisoned. I'm through. I'm off the stuff for life. A. M., this morning. What a night! What an evening!"

"I thought," she said, "that you were going to stay at the office and work late. You said you'd be working every night this week."

"Yeah, I know," he said. "But it gave me the jumps, thinking about going down there and sitting at that desk. I went up to May's—she was throwing a party. Say, there was somebody there said they knew you."

"Honestly?" she said. "Man or woman?"

"Dame," he said. "Name's Carol McCall. Say, why haven't I been told about her before? That's what I call a girl! What a looker she is!"

“Oh, really?” she said. “That’s funny—I never heard of anyone that thought that. I’ve heard people say she was sort of nice-looking, if she wouldn’t make up so much. But I never heard of anyone that thought she was pretty.”

“Pretty is right,” he said. “What a couple of eyes she’s got on her!”

“Really?” she said. “I never noticed them particularly. But I haven’t seen her for a long time—sometimes people change, or something.”

“She says she used to go to school with you,” he said.

“Well, we went to the same school,” she said. “I simply happened to go to public school because it happened to be right near us, and Mother hated to have me crossing streets. But she was three or four classes ahead of me. She’s ages older than I am.”

“She’s three or four classes ahead of them all,” he said. “Dance! Can she step! ‘Burn your clothes, baby.’ I kept telling her. I must have been fried pretty.”

“I was out dancing myself, last night,” she said. “Wally Dilton and I. He’s just been pestering me to go out with him. He’s the most wonderful dancer. Goodness! I didn’t get home till I don’t know what time. I must look just simply a wreck. Don’t I?”

“You look all right,” he said.

“Wally’s crazy,” she said. “The things he says! For some crazy reason or other, he’s got it into his head that I’ve got beautiful eyes, and well, he just kept talking about them till I didn’t know where to look. I was so embarrassed. I got so red. I thought everybody in the place would be looking at me. I got just as red as a brick. Beautiful eyes! Isn’t he crazy?”

“He’s all right,” he said. “Say, this little McCall girl, she’s had all kinds of offers to go into moving pictures. ‘Why don’t you go ahead and go?’ I told her. But she says she doesn’t feel like it.”

“There was a man up at the lake, two summers ago,” she said. “He was a director or something with one of the big moving-picture people—oh, he had all kinds of influence! – and he used to keep insisting and insisting that I ought to be in the movies. Said I ought to be doing sort of Garbo parts. I used to just laugh at him. Imagine!”

“She’s had about a million offers,” he said. “I told her to go ahead and go. She keeps getting these offers all the time.”

“Oh, really?” she said. “Oh, listen, I knew I had something to ask you. Did you call me up last night, by any chance?”

“Me? He said. ‘No, I didn’t call you.’”

“While I was out, Mother said this man’s voice kept calling up,” she said. “I thought maybe it might be you, by some chance. I wonder who it could have been. Oh – I guess I know who it was. Yes, that’s who it was!”

“No, I didn’t call you,” he said. “I couldn’t have seen a telephone, last night. What a head I had on me, this morning! I called Carol up, around ten, and she said she was feeling great! Can that girl hold her liquor!”

"It's a funny thing about me," she said. "It just makes me feel sort of sick to see a girl drink. It's just something in me, I guess. I don't mind a man so much, but it makes me feel perfectly terrible to see a girl get intoxicated. It's just the way I am, I suppose."

"Does she carry it! He said. "And then feels great the next day. There's a girl! Hey, what are you doing there? I don't want any more tea, thanks. I'm not one of these tea boys. And these tea-rooms give me the jumps. Look at all those old dames, will you? Enough to give me the jumps."

"Of course, if you'd rather be some place, drinking, with I don't know what kinds of people," she said. "I'm sure I don't see how I can help that. Goodness, there are enough people that are glad enough to take me to tea. I don't know how many people keep calling me up and pestering me to take me to tea. Plenty of people!"

"All right, all right. I'm here, aren't I?" he said. "Keep your hair on."

"I could name them all day," she said.

"All right," he said. "What's there to crab about?"

"Goodness, if isn't any of my business what you do," she said. "But I hate you wasting time with people that aren't nearly good enough for you. That's all."

"No need worrying over me," he said. "I'll be all right. Listen. You don't have to worry."

"It's just I don't like to see you wasting your time," she said, "staying up all night and then feeling terribly the next day. Ah, I was forgetting he was so sick. Ah, I was mean, wasn't I, scolding him when he was so mizzable. Poor boy. How's he feel now?"

"Oh, I'm all right," he said. "I feel fine. You want anything else? How about getting a check? I got to make a telephone call before six."

"Oh, really?" she said. "Calling up Carol?"

"She said she might be in around now," he said.

"Seeing her tonight?" she said.

"She is going to let me know when I call up," he said. "She's probably got about a million dates. Why?"

"I was just wondering," she said. "Goodness, I've got to fly! I'm having dinner with Wally, and he's so crazy, he's probably there now. He's called me up about a hundred times today."

"Wait till I pay the check, he said, "and I'll put you on a bus."

"Oh, don't bother," she said. "It's right at the corner. I've got to fly. I suppose you want to stay and call up your friend from here?"

"It's an idea, he said. "Sure you'll be all right?"

"Oh, sure," she said. Busily she gathered her gloves and purse, and left her chair. He rose, not quite fully, as she stopped beside him.

"When'll I see you again?" she said.

"I'll call you up," he said. "I'm all tied up, down at the office and everything. Tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a ring,"

"Honestly, I have more dates! she said. "It's terrible. I don't know when I'll have a minute. But you call up, will you?"

"I'll do that," he said. "Take care of yourself."

"You take care of yourself," she said. "Hope you'll feel all right."

"Oh, I'm fine," he said. "Just beginning to come back to life."

"Be sure and let me know how you feel," she said. "Will you? Sure, now? Well, good-bye. Oh, have a good time tonight!"

"Thanks," he said. "Hope you have a good time, too."

"Oh, I will," she said. "I expect to. I've got to rush! Oh, I nearly forgot! Thanks ever so much for the tea. It was lovely."

"Be yourself, will you?" he said.

"It was," she said. "Well. Now don't forget to call me up, will you? Sure? Well, good-by."

"So long," he said.

She walked on down the little line between the blue-painted tables.

### ***Questions for comprehension:***

1. Does the story remind you a play in its composition?
2. Who is the suffering party in the story?
3. Who was the initiator of this date? Did the girl come in time?
4. What was the party that hurt the girl's feelings?
5. What were her attempts to win him back?
6. How do the characters part?

### ***Questions for comprehension:***

1. What was the girl's aim in making this date?
2. Can you approve of the boy's behaviour?
3. What remarks betray the girl's feelings of jealousy and anguish?
4. Is there any hope to save their relations?
5. How can you account for the title of the story?

## **THE SEARCH FOR TOMMY FLYNN**

*By Stan Barstow*

On a December evening just three weeks before Christmas, after an uneasy mild day that had died in a darkening flush of violet twilight, Christie Wilcox came down into Cressley to look for his long-lost pal, Tommy Flynn.

His mates at the factory said Christie was only elevenpence-ha'penny in the shilling,\* <sup>1</sup>and had been ever since the war; but like the management, they tolerated him, because he was able-bodied and harmless, and for most of the time as near normal as hardly mattered. For most of the time – except on the occasions when this blinding urge came over him, this unswervable obsession to find Tommy Flynn, the pal he had not seen since the night their ship was blown from under them. And then he would leave the little house on Cressley Common where he lived with his widowed mother and go down into the town to search. Sometimes he would stop someone on the street and ask, 'Have you seen Tommy Flynn?' and the questioned would perhaps mutter something, or just pass by without a word, only a look, leaving Christie standing on the pavement edge, looking after them with helpless, stupefied loneliness and dejection on his face, and in the droop of his shoulders. But mostly he bothered no one, but simply scanned the features of people on the streets and opened the door of every pub he passed, searching the faces in the smoky taprooms and bars. Tommy Flynn had been a great one for pubs.

But he never found him. He never found him because *They* wouldn't help him. *They* knew where Tommy Flynn was but *They* wouldn't tell Christie. *They* just looked at him with blank faces, or nodded and grinned and winked at one another, because *They* knew where Tommy Flynn was all the time, and *They* wouldn't tell.

Some of *Them* had tried to tell him that Tommy Flynn was dead; but Christie knew otherwise. He knew that Tommy was alive and waiting for him to find him. Tommy needed him. The last words he had ever said to him were, 'For Christ sake get me out of this, Christie!' And Christie had not been able to help. Why, he could not remember. But now he could help. Now he could help Tommy, if only he could find him.

He had walked a mile and a half from his home, letting the lighted buses career past him down the long winding road; and on the edge of town he began to look inside the pubs he passed, sometimes startling the people there by the sudden intensity of his face, all cheek-bones and jaw and dark burning eyes, as it appeared briefly in the doorway, then vanished again. And when, after more than two hours, he came to the centre of town, he was, as usual, no further in his search. He stood on a street corner and watched the faces of the people passing by. He even stood lost in contemplation of the suited dummies in the lighted window of a tailor" shop, as though he hoped that one of them might suddenly move and reveal itself as his lost pal. And all the while the yearning, the terrible yearning despair in him grew into an agony, and he muttered hopelessly, over and over again,, 'Tommy, oh, Tommy, I can't find you, Tommy.'

He wandered along a line of people queueing outside a cinema for the last show, looking at every face, his own face burning so oddly that it provoked

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\* elevenpence-ha'penny in the shilling – зл. У него не все дома

giggles from one of a pair of girls standing there; and a policeman standing a little way along looked his way, as though expecting that Christie might at any moment whip off his cap and break into an illegal song and dance.

They laughed. They laughed because he could not find Tommy Flynn. Everybody against him: no one to help him. He stopped and gazed at, without seeing, the 'stills' in the case on the wall by the cinema entrance, then turned away.

Some time later the dim glow of light from a doorway along an alley took his attention. It occurred to him that this was a pub he had never been in before. A new place to search. He went down the alley, pushed open the door, and stepped along a short corridor, past the door marked 'Ladies,' and into the single low –ceilinged L –shaped room of the pub. It was quiet, with only a very few people drinking there. Two men stood drinking from pint glasses and talking quietly. The landlord had stepped out for a moment and there was no one behind the bar. One of the two men knew Christie and greeted him.

"Now then, Christie lad."

And almost at once he saw that Christie was not himself.

"Have you seen Tommy Flynn?" Christie asked him.

"Can't say as I have, lad," the man said, and his right eyelid fluttered in a wink at his companion, who now turned and looked at Christie also.

"Tommy Flynn?" the second man said. "Name sounds familiar."

"You don't know him," the first man said. "He's a pal of Christie's. Isn't he, Christie?"

"A pal," Christie said.

"Well, he hasn't been here tonight. Has he, Walt?"

"That's right. We haven't seen him."

"How long is it since you've seen him, Christie?"

"A long time," Christie mumbled. "A long time ago."

"Well, I'll tell you what," the man said: "you go on home, and we'll keep an eye open for Tommy Flynn. And if we see him we'll tell him you were looking for him. How's that?"

"What about a drink afore you go?" the man called Walt said good-naturedly.

"He doesn't drink, Walt," the first man said.

"Don't you smoke, either? Walt asked.

Christie shook his head. He was beginning to feel confused and he looked from one to the other of them.

"But I'll bet you're a devil with the women."

The first man laid a hand on his companion's arm. "Easy, Walt."

"Oh, I'm on'y kiddin'," Walt said. "He doesn't mind, do you, lad? Take a bit o' kid, can't you, eh?"\*

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\* Take a bit o' kid, can't you, eh?" – Ты же не обижаешься на шутку, а?



But the film of incomprehension had come down over Christie's eyes and he just stood and looked at each of them in turn.

"I've got to go now," he said in a moment.

"Aye, that's right, Christie, lad. Off you go home; an' if we see Tommy Flynn we'll tell him. Won't we, Walt?"

"Course we will," Walt said.

Christie had turned away from them before he remembered about the money, and he wondered if he should tell them so that they could tell Tommy Flynn. Tommy had always been so short of money. He put his hand into his pocket and took out some of the notes. Then, at once, he changed his mind and went out without saying anything.

The two men had already turned back to their glasses and only one person in the bar saw the money in Christie's hand: a middle-aged tart with greying hair dyed a copper red, a thin, heavily powdered face and pendant ear-rings, sitting at a corner table with a tall West Indian, his lean handsome features, the colour of milk chocolate, wearing a powder-blue felt hat with the brim turned up all round. As Christie went out she got up, saying something about powdering her nose, and left the bar.

Outside in the alley Christie walked away from the pub, then stopped after a few paces, to stand indecisively on the cobbles. Always he came to this point, the dead end, when there was no sign of Tommy Flynn, and nowhere else to look. He bowed his head and furrowed his brow in thought as his mind wrestled heavily with the problem.

Light sliced across the alley as the door of the pub opened, then banged shut again. The woman paused on the step, looking both ways, before stepping down and clicking across the cobbles to Christie.

He took no notice of her till she spoke at his side.

"Did you say you were looking for somebody?"

And then Christie's head jerked up and his eyes, level with the woman's, blazed.

"Tommy Flynn," he said. "I'm looking for Tommy Flynn. Have you seen Tommy Flynn?" he asked with breathless eagerness in his voice.

"What's he look like?" the woman asked, playing for time.

But Christie only mumbled something she did not catch and then, the light gone from his eyes, "I'm looking for Tommy Flynn."

A man entered the alley from the far end and walked along towards the pub. The woman took one step back into shadow. When the door of the pub had closed behind him the woman said:

"I know a Tommy Flynn."

And Christie came alive again as though a current of power had been passed through him.

"You do? You know Tommy Flynn? Where is he? Where's Tommy Flynn?" His hand gripped her arm.

"I think I know where to find him." The woman said. "Only ... you'd have to make it worth my trouble like. I mean, I've left my friend an' everythin' ...". She stopped, realizing that Christie was not taking in what she said. "Money, dear," she said, with a kind of coarse delicacy.

"Money? I've got money. Lots of money." He thrust his hand into his pocket and dragged out a fistful of notes. "Look – lots of money."

Startled, the woman covered Christie's hand with her own and looked quickly right and left along the alley.

"Just keep it in your pocket, dear, for the time being."

She put her arm through his and turned him towards the mouth of the alley. "C'mon, then,," she said. "Let's go find Tommy Flynn."

Once across the lighted thoroughfare beyond the alley the woman led Christie into the gloom of back streets, hurrying him under the sheer dark walls of mills; and he followed with mute eagerness, sometimes doing more than follow as in his excited haste he pulled away so that he was leading, the woman occasionally having to break into a trot to keep pace with him.

"Not so fast, dear," she said several times as Christie outpaced her. She was breathless. "Take it easy. We've plenty of time."

And all the while she was thinking how to get money away from Christie. He was simple, there was no doubt about that. But often simple people were stubborn and stupid and untrusting. She would have taken him into a pub on the pretext of waiting for this Tommy Flynn and got him to drink; only she did not want to be remembered afterwards as having been seen with him. So she led him on, her mind working, until they came to a bridge over the dark river. She pulled at his arm then she turned him on to a path leading down to the river bank.

"This way, dear."

To the right the river ran between the mills and warehouses of the town; and to the left the footpath led under the bridge and beyond, where the river slid over dam stakes and flowed on through open fields. In the darkness under the bridge the woman stopped and made a pretence of looking at a watch.

"It's early yet," she said. "Tommy Flynn won't be home yet. Let's wait here a while."

She kept hold of Christie's arm as she stood with her back to the stonework of the bridge.

"What d'you want Tommy Flynn for?"

"He's my pal," Christie said, stirring restlessly beside her.

"And haven't you seen him lately?"

"No... I can't find him. Nobody'll ever tell me where he is... We were on a ship together...an'..." His voice tailed off. Then he said with a groan. "I've got to find him. I've got to."

"We'll find him," the woman said, "in a little while." And she looked at Christie in the darkness under the bridge.

For a moment then she stood away from him and fumbled with her clothes. "Why don't you an' me have a nice time while we're waiting?" She took him and drew him to her warm thighs. "You like a nice time, don't you?" she said into his ear.

"What about Tommy?" Christie said. "Where is he?"

"I know where Tommy is," the woman said, her free hand exploring Christie's pocket, where the money was.

"Why aren't we going to him, then?"

"Because he is not at home yet." The woman kept patience in her voice. "I'll tell you when it's time to go."

The thought had already come to her that he might be dangerous, and she recalled newspaper reports, which she read avidly, of women like herself being found strangled or knifed in lonely places. But there was always an element of risk in a life such as hers, and Christie seemed to her harmless enough. There was, too, the feel of all that money in her fingers, and the greed was stronger than any timidity that might have troubled her, so she played for time in the only way she knew how.

"Why don't you do something?" she said, moving her body against his. "You know what to do, don't you? You like it, don't you?"

The feel of her tight thighs moving soft and warm against his fingers roused momentary excitement in Christie, causing him to giggle suddenly.

"I know what you want," he said. "You want me to—" and he whispered the obscenity in her ear.

"That's right," the woman said. "You like it, don't you? You've done it before, haven't you?"

"Me an' Tommy," Christie said. "We used to go with women. All over the world. All sorts of women."

"That's right. You and Tommy."

"Tommy," Christie said, and, his excitement, with the woman broken, tore his hand free. "Tommy," he said again, and looked away along the path.

He stepped away from her and her hand, pulling free of his pocket, retained its hold on the notes. She hastily adjusted her clothes as he moved away along the path.

"Wait a minute." She said. "It's early yet. It's no good going yet."

"I'm going now." Christie said, walking away. "I'm going to find Tommy."

Stepping out of the shadow of the bridge into moonlight, he stopped and threw up his arms, uttering a cry. Beside him now, the woman said, "What's wrong?"

"Tommy," Christie said, trembling violently. "Look, look, look."

And following the wild fling of his arm the woman saw something dark bobbing in the greasy water by the dam stakes.

"Tommy!" Christie shouted, and the woman said, "Quiet, quiet," and looked anxiously all about her.

"It's Tommy," Christie said, and the next instant he was free of her and bouncing down the rough grass bank to the water edge.

"Come back," the woman said. "Don't be a fool. Come back."

"I'm coming, Tommy," Christie bawled.

For a few seconds the woman hesitated there on the bank, then she turned and fled along the path, away from the bridge, stuffing the banknotes into her bag as she went. Behind her she heard the deep splash as Christie plunged into the river, and she quickened her pace to a stumbling run.

Standing in the middle of the room, his shoulders hunched, Christie said, "I found him, Mam. I found Tommy Flynn, an' he's drowned, all wet an' drowned. I couldn't get to him..."

There was something of resignation in his mother's dismay. She looked past him to the police sergeant who had brought him home.

"Where...?" she said, in a voice that was little more than a movement of the lips.

"The river."

"He's dead," Christie said. "All wet an' drowned."

"Well then, Christie lad, don't take on so. He's happy, I'm sure he is."

But as she spoke Christie began to cry helplessly, collapsing against her. She held him for the second of time it took the sergeant to spring across the room and get his hands under his arms under Christie's armpits.

"We'd best get him upstairs," the mother said, and the sergeant nodded. He swung Christie up like a child into his arms, and Christie wept against his chest as he was carried up the stairs up to his bedroom.

The sergeant laid Christie on the bed and stood aside in silence while the widow swiftly stripped her son and set to work on his cold body with a rough towel. There was admiration in the sergeant's eyes by the time the woman had pulled the sheets over Christie and tucked him firmly in. She struck a match then lit a night-light standing in a source of water on the chest of drawers. Christie was weeping soft now.

"He doesn't like the dark," she explained as she picked up the wet clothes and ushered the sergeant out of the room. "I think he'll go to sleep now."

In the living -room once more, the sergeant remembered to take off his helmet, and he mopped his brow at the same time.

"Wet through," the woman said, feeling her son's clothes. "Absolutely sodden. Whatever happened?"

"He must have been in the river," the sergeant said. "My constable said he'd run up to him, dripping wet, and shouting that this Tommy Flynn was in the water: but when Johnson went with him all he could see was a dead dog. Seems that was what your son had taken for this Tommy Flynn."

The woman bowed her head and put her hand to her face.

“Anyway, the constable didn’t take much more notice of it. He said he’d often seen your son about the town, and he knew...” The sergeant stopped and grimaced.

“He knew that Christie wasn’t quite right in the head,” the widow said.

“That’s about it, Missis.” The sergeant shifted his weight from one foot to the other; then, as though he had only just thought of it, he took out his notebook.

“I know it’s upsetting,” he said, “but I shall have to put in a report. I wondered if you’d give me a bit of information on your son...”

“What do you want to know?”

“Well, where this Tommy Flynn comes into it; and what makes your boy go off looking for him.”

“During the war, it was, when he met him,” the widow said, raising her head and looking somewhere past the sergeant. “He was in the Merchant Navy. He was all right till then: as normal as anybody. This Tommy Flynn was his special pal. He used to write home about him. He hardly mentioned anything else. His letters were full of him. It was all Tommy Flynn had said this, or done that. And what they were going to do after the war. They were going to start a window-cleaning business. Tommy Flynn said there’d be a shortage of window cleaners, and all they needed was a couple of ladders and a cart and they could make money hand over fist. I don’t know whether there was anything in it or not... Anyway, Christie had all planned for Tommy Flynn to come and live here. He was an orphan. I didn’t mind: he seemed a nice enough lad, and he looked after Christie, showing him the ropes...”

“You never met him?” the sergeant asked.

The widow shook her head. “I never saw him, but Christie thought the world of him. He could hardly remember his father, y’know, and this Tommy Flynn was a bit older than him. He sort of took him in hand.

Then towards the end of the war their ship was hit by one o’ them Japanese suicide planes and got on fire. Christie was on a raft by himself for ages and ages. He was near out of his mind by the time they found him, and all he could talk about was Tommy Flynn. They reckoned Tommy must have gone down with ship; but Christie wouldn’t have that. He raved at them and called them liars.”

“But they’d treat him?”

“Oh aye, they treated him. They said he’d never be quite the same again; but of course you can’t hardly tell unless he’s in one of his do’s<sup>\*</sup>, and he didn’t start with them till he’d been home a while.”

“How often does he have these ... er – attacks?” the sergeant asked.

“Oh, not often. He’s all right for months on end. Anybody ‘ud just take him as being a bit slow, y’know. An’ he was such a bright lad...”

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<sup>\*</sup> unless he’s in one of his do’s, (разг.) – если на него не накатит

“Why don’t you try and get some more advice?” the sergeant suggested. “Y’know he might do himself some damage one of these times.”

“I did ask the doctor,” the widow said; “and I mentioned it to Christie – when he was his usual self, I mean. He begged and prayed of me not to let them take him away. He broke down and cried. He said he’d die if they shut him anywhere... It wouldn’t be so bad, y’see, if he was one way or the other; then I’d know what to do...”

She swallowed and her lips quivered, then stilled again as she compressed them before looking straight at the sergeant.

“You’ll look out for him if you see him about, Sergeant, won’t you?” she said.

“I’ll look out for him,” he assured her, frowning a little. “But I’d get some more treatment for him if I were you, Missis.”

“I’ll see,” she said. “I’ll have to think about it again now.”

The sergeant picked up his helmet.

“It’ll be all right about tonight?” she asked. “There’ll be no trouble?”

“I shouldn’t think so. I shall have to report it, o’course; but it’ll be all right. He hasn’t broken the law.”

Not yet, he thought, and put his hand into his tunic pocket. “By the way, you’d better have this. It came out of his pocket.” He put the wet notes on the table. “Four quid.”

He caught the startled look fleetingly in her eyes before she hid it.

“Do you let him have as much money as he likes?” he asked, watching her.

“Well, not as a rule... I like him to have a bit in his pocket, though, and then he’s all right... If anything happens, I mean.”

The sergeant nodded, his eyes remaining on her face a moment longer before he reached for his latch.

“Well, I’ll get along.”

The widow seemed to stir from thought. “Yes, yes... all right. And thanks for taking so much trouble.”

“Just doing me job, Missis.” The sergeant bade her good night as he opened the door and stepped out on to the pavement.

When the door had closed behind him the widow looked at the money on the table. She picked up the notes and fingered them, the thoughts tumbling over in her mind, before going to the dresser and taking her purse from the drawer. She examined its contents and then put it away again, closing the drawer, and went quietly upstairs to her room.

She took a chair and stood on it to reach into the cupboard over the built-in wardrobe for the shoe-box in which she kept all her and Christie’s savings. She knew almost at once by its lightness that it was empty, but she removed the lid just the same. Her heart hammered and she swayed on the chair. Nearly a hundred pounds had been in the box, and it was gone. All the money they had in the world.

She put the box back in the cupboard and stepped down, replacing the chair by the bed. She put the hand to her brow and thought furiously, pointlessly. Christie was quiet in his room. She went out and stood for a few moments outside his door. Then she went downstairs and felt in every pocket of the wet clothing on the hearth. Nothing. She sank into a chair and put her head in her hands and began to sob silently.

When Christie woke next morning she was at his bedside.

"What did you do with the money you took out of the box, Christie?" she said. "Where is it?"

"He's drowned, Christie said. "Tommy's drowned. All wet and dead."

She could get no other response from him and in a little while she went away. He showed no sign of wanting to get up and at intervals during the day she returned, hoping he had recovered from the shock last evening, and asked him, speaking slowly and carefully, as to a child, enunciating the words with urgent clarity, "The money, Christie, remember? What did you do with the money?"

But he stared at the ceiling with dark haunted eyes and told her nothing.

He never told her anything again. The search for Tommy Flynn was ended; and shortly after she let them come and take him away.

#### ***Questions for comprehension:***

- 1. What happened to Christie during the war?*
- 2. Were all the people sympathetic with him?*
- 3. Why did he believe the woman who promised him to find his friend?*
- 4. What were her real intentions?*
- 5. Why was his mother in despair?*

#### ***Questions for discussion:***

- 1. What is the idea of this story?*
- 2. Why did most people sympathize with Tommy?*
- 3. Can you see the analogy between the woman and 'the black sheep'?*
- 4. Who should take care of the victims of war?*

Учебное издание

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