

# The Way Up

WILLIAM HOFFMAN

Sitting in the back row of English literature class, Jamie looked through an open window toward a rounded silver water tower which poked up through the woods like a great metal tulip. The tower had recently been painted and appeared immaculate in the spring sunlight. Tubular<sup>1</sup> steel legs were hidden at the bottom by newly greening oaks, sycamores, and poplars that bordered the rear grounds of the suburban Richmond High School.

Jamie had made no brag. He had not even when the evening he was at Jawbone's house, loafing in the basement playroom with the others.

"Look at Jamie's," Jawbone said. Jawbone was a dark, wiry boy of eighteen who had a jutting chin. He wanted to go to West Point.<sup>2</sup> He stuck a finger on Jamie's picture in the new yearbook. Under the names of the others were accomplishments—teams, organizations, trophies.

"Not even the Glee Club," Nick said, lying on a sofa, his legs hanging over the arm rest at one end. He was a blond boy whose father owned a fancy restaurant downtown.

"They'll never know you been here," Alf said. Alf, the top student, was a heavyset, shaggy boy who'd won his letter in baseball.

More sensitive than the rest, he was imme-

diately sorry. He reached across a chair to punch Jamie's arm. Jamie dodged and smiled, though smiling was like cracking rock.

They meant the remarks good-naturedly. Still, the words made him see what his relationship to them was. He had gone through four years of high school without leaving a mark. He had ridden with them daily, shared their secrets, and eaten in their homes. They considered him a friend. But they expected nothing from him.

At first he was resentful and hurt, as if betrayed. Next he had fantasies of heroic derring-do<sup>3</sup> on the basketball court or baseball diamond—because of his smallness he didn't dream of football glory any longer. After the fantasies, he tried to think of projects. Finally he came up with a plan.

He had spent a lot of time working out details. He was now merely waiting for the right day—or rather night. Recently there had been rain and blustering weather. Even when the sun shone, the wind gusted. This afternoon, however, as he sat in English literature class, Jamie saw that the treetops barely quivered.

His eyes kept returning to the silver water

1. **tubular:** in the shape of a tube.

2. **West Point:** the United States Military Academy in southeastern New York State.

3. **derring-do:** reckless, courageous actions.

tower. Other students had attempted the climb. A few inventive ones had gone up as far as the catwalk around the fat belly of the tank, where they had painted skulls and crossbones. A sophomore had lost his nerve halfway and got stuck. The Richmond rescue squad had coaxed him down like a kitten from a light pole. The boy had been so ashamed he had tried to join the Army. Nobody had ever made it to the stubby spike on the crown.

Mr. Tharpe, the principal, understood the tower's temptation and had ordered the ladder above the catwalk taken off. He had also directed that the ladder up the leg be cut high above the ground. Lastly, he had made climbing the tower punishable by expulsion.

The toughest problem was getting from the catwalk to the crown. As the tank served only the school, it wasn't large, but without a ladder the rounded sides appeared unscalable.<sup>4</sup> Jamie concluded that he needed a light hook which could be thrown fifteen to twenty feet.

He found what he wanted in a Richmond boating store—a small, three-pronged, aluminum anchor. Along with the anchor he bought fifty feet of braided nylon line that had a thousand-pound test strength. He also purchased a hacksaw. The clerk packed the things in a strong cardboard box, and as soon as Jamie reached home, he hid them in the back of his closet.

He assembled other equipment as well—tennis shoes, a pair of light cotton gloves, a sweat suit, which would keep him warm in the night air yet allow him to move freely, a billed cap, a small flashlight with a holding ring, and a sheath knife to fasten to his leather belt.

Twice he scheduled attempts on the tower. The first night a thunderstorm washed him out. The second, the moon was too bright, increasing the risk that he would be seen.

Delay made him uneasy. He felt that if he didn't go soon, he might lose his nerve.

*Nobody had ever made it to the stubby spike on the crown.*

The bell rang. He went to his locker and then left the building quickly. He wanted to get away without the others seeing him, but Alf called his name. Alf ran down the sidewalk. He adjusted his glasses.

"Want to shoot baskets?" he asked, making an imaginary hook shot. He held up two fingers to indicate a score.

"No, thanks," Jamie answered, moving on.

"You're getting pretty exclusive lately," Alf said.

"I've always been exclusive," Jamie told him, hoping it sounded like a joke.

He spent the afternoon working around the house. He cut the grass and spread some of the lawn fertilizer his father had stored in the garage. When he had a chance, he went up to his room and again checked his equipment. The check was just nervousness. He knew his equipment was right.

After dinner, as he was sure they would, his parents went next door to play cards. He

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4. **unscalable**: impossible to climb.

#### Words

#### to Know

#### and Use

**hacksaw** (hak' sô') *n.* a saw used to cut metal



and his brother David were left in the house. David was a year younger, although already heavier than Jamie. He had been asked to come out for football and liked to flex his muscles before a mirror.

Jamie sat at his desk and pretended to study so he wouldn't be questioned. He listened to sounds of the night coming through the open window. There was some wind, but not enough to worry him. The sky was cloudy.

When David went down to the kitchen for a sandwich, Jamie undressed, put on the sweat suit, and pulled pajamas over it. He kept his socks on. He slipped his belt through slots in the leather sheath of the knife and buckled it around his waist. Hearing David approach, Jamie got into bed.

"You sick?" David asked, surprised.

"Just sleepy."

"You look kind of queasy."

"I'm okay."

David watched TV and did his exercises before coming to bed. Jamie listened, as he had for weeks, to the pattern of his brother's breathing. In practice, Jamie had gotten up several times and moved around the dark room. Once David had waked. Jamie had explained he was after another blanket.

David breathed softly. When he was completely asleep, his mouth opened and he wheezed slightly. Jamie heard the wheezing now. Still he did not move, although he wanted badly to start. He lay on his back, eyes open, waiting for his parents.

They returned at eleven. He heard them in the kitchen. Finally his mother came to his and David's room. Jamie smelled her perfume. She bent over them, lightly adjusting the covers. He kept his eyes shut until she went out.

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SEVENTEEN 1959 Lew Davis Courtesy of Yares Gallery,  
Scottsdale, Arizona.

#### Words

to Know

and Use

queasy (kwē' zē) *adj.* nauseated; feeling uncomfortable and uneasy

As soon as she was gone, he swung his legs out of bed. He stood, listening, but David's breathing did not change. Jamie walked to the closet, slipped off his pajamas, and sat on the floor to pull on his tennis shoes. He tied the laces in double knots.

He put on his baseball cap and fastened the large, red bandanna around his neck. The bandanna, too, was part of his plan. He had bought it in a Richmond ten-cent store. For some time he had been carrying it to school and whipping it out to be seen by Jawbone, Nick, and Alf. Though no name was on it, people would identify it as his—the right people, anyway.

Lastly he worked his fingers into the cotton gloves, gathered the hacksaw and aluminum anchor, and tiptoed to the window. It was already half-raised. Earlier in the week he'd rubbed soap along the metal tracks to prevent squeaking.

The window slid up noiselessly. He un-snapped the screen and lifted it out. David turned in his bed but did not wake. Jamie climbed onto the window ledge, lowered his equipment to the ground, and stepped down to the grass of the back yard. He stood still and listened. David did not stir. Jamie replaced the screen without hooking it and picked up his equipment.

Crouching, he ran—not fast enough to wear himself out, but with the easy lope of a distance runner. He carried the anchor in his right hand, the saw in his left. The damp grass of neighboring yards brushed his feet softly. He stayed in the shadows.

On reaching the high school, he cut behind the main building and headed toward the athletic field. When he was almost to the other side, a dog snarled close behind him. He was afraid that if he continued running,

the dog might jump him. He turned and ducked behind a pile of canvas tackling dummies.<sup>5</sup>

The dog leaped out of the dark, its hair bristling, its teeth bared. Jamie talked softly, holding his hands at his sides so as not to excite the boxer. The animal circled, sniffed, and growled.

"King!" a voice from the field house called. It was Carver, the watchman—an erect, dark figure outlined against a door. "Here, boy!"

The dog sprang off toward the field house. Jamie pressed against the ground. Carver leaned over to pat the boxer.

"What's out there?" he asked, turning on his long flashlight. The light brushed across the dummies. Jamie held his breath. Carver talked to the dog. Finally the flashlight went out, and Carver entered the field house. The door slammed.

*The steel legs were like those of a giant insect poised over him.*

Jamie pushed up and sprinted. He wanted to be well away in case the boxer was still loose. His arms pumped. By the time he reached the woods, he was winded. There was no use even starting up the tower unless he was fresh. He rested against a tree.

When his breath steadied, he walked on through the woods. He didn't need his flashlight. Clouds had slid away from a sickle moon, which laid a pale sheen on his

5. **tackling dummies:** upright, matlike objects connected to flexible poles and used for tackling practice in football.

**Words**

**to Know**

**and Use**

**sheen** (shēn) *n.* brightness; shininess

path. He stopped once to be certain nobody was following.

He walked out of the woods to the tower and under it. Though the tank wasn't large, it was high and seemed to float like a balloon. The silver skin shone eerily. The steel legs were like those of a giant insect poised over him. He touched the steel and kicked a cement footing to rid himself of the sensation. The tank was simply a water tower which could be climbed.

**H**e didn't hurry. Hurrying might tire him. Methodically he unwound the line from the anchor. He looped the saw onto his belt. He adjusted his cap. Standing away from a leg of the tower, he swung the anchor around his head like a lasso and let fly at the ladder.

The hooks missed by inches. The light anchor clanged against tubular steel, which reverberated like a gong. The sound was loud—loud enough, perhaps, to alert the watchman or the family who lived in a board-and-batten<sup>6</sup> house nearby. Quickly Jamie picked up the anchor, swung it, and threw. A prong clattered over a rung.

He had practiced rope climbing. Two or three afternoons a week he had pulled himself to the I-beam at the top of the gym where ropes were attached to swivels. He had learned to go up without using his legs. Basketball players had stood around to watch, impressed that anybody so slight could climb so well.

"You're turning into a regular Atlas," Nick had said.

Jamie had already tied knots every five feet along the nylon line in order to have a better grip on it. He fingered the line and

pulled. As he looked up, he felt doubt. The line was thin, the tower great. He jumped before he had time to think further.

Climbing made him feel better. He reached the bottom of the ladder and easily drew himself onto it. He stopped to loosen the anchor. He wrapped the line around the anchor's shank and hooked it over his left shoulder.

He stepped up slowly. He was attempting to pace himself for the distance. He looked neither up nor down. Doing so might cause dizziness. He narrowed his eyes and tried to see no more than his own gloved hands closing over rungs.

After what seemed a long while, he glanced up to get his bearings<sup>7</sup> on the catwalk. He was disappointed at how far it was above him. He estimated that he had come only a quarter of the way. His excitement was giving him a false sense of time.

He kept on. When he again looked up, he had climbed not quite halfway. His breathing was noisy, and he rested. As he clung to the ladder, he thought how easy it would be to go back now. Nobody knew he was here. He could go down and slip into his bed without ever being missed.

He was angry at himself for considering it. His trouble was thinking too much. To block the thoughts, he stepped up, determined to reach the catwalk without stopping again.

He climbed until his arms and legs ached. He sucked at air. He did not raise his eyes lest the distance to the catwalk discourage him. Occasionally a light wind gusted

6. **board-and-batten**: having walls constructed with wide vertical wood strips alternating with thin wood strips that are recessed or protruding.

7. **get his bearings**: figure out his situation.

**Words  
to Know  
and Use**

**methodically** (mə thād' ik lē) *adv.* done in a regular, orderly way; systematically  
**reverberate** (ri ver' bə rāt') *v.* to re-echo, resound

against his face and chest—not hard enough to worry him, but sufficient to slow his step.

His head banged steel. The blow frightened and pained him, and he clutched at the ladder. The catwalk door was right over him, its heavy padlock swinging from his having hit it.

He put his right leg through the ladder and hooked the foot over a rung to keep from falling in case he lost his balance. He unbuckled his belt to get the hacksaw. Because of the awkwardness of his position, he had to work slowly. His left hand held the lock, his right the saw.

Cutting was more difficult than he'd anticipated. He had to rest and wipe sweat from his face. When the metal finally snapped, he flung the saw from him. It was a long time hitting the ground.

He threw the padlock down, too, glad he had on gloves in case an investigation checked fingerprints. He raised a hand to the trap door and pushed. The thick iron squeaked but gave only a little. He stepped up another rung in order to hunch his shoulders and the back of his head against it. The door rose, teetered, and fell to the catwalk with a loud clang.

He climbed the rest of the way up the ladder, swung off it to the catwalk, and, holding the railing, closed the trap door. As he straightened to look out over the dark land, he had his first real sense of how high he was. Instinctively, he pressed against the tank. He edged around the catwalk until he faced the school. Lights from houses were faint and twinkling, and he saw the skyline milkiness of Richmond itself.

He grinned, thinking of Alf, Nick, and Jawbone. They wouldn't believe it! They were lying down there, warm in their bunks. He waved a hand over them.

He turned to the tank. He was still a good

fifteen feet from the top. As he calculated the distance, a cloud passing over gave him a feeling that the tower was falling. Space shifted under him. He grabbed at the tank.

Leaning against it, he considered tying his bandanna to the railing on the school side. In the morning everybody would see it. Going up this far was certainly a victory, and people would be impressed.

He took off the bandanna and hesitated, fingering it. For tying the bandanna to the railing he might be temporarily honored, but if he was the first to reach the top, he would be remembered for years.

He retied the bandanna around his neck and unwound the nylon line from the anchor. In order to throw to the top of the tank from the proper angle, he had to lean out and flap his arm upward. He forced his thigh hard against the railing. Holding the anchor from him, he threw.

The anchor thumped on top of the rounded tower but slid back when he pulled the line. He jumped to keep from being hit. He stumbled and almost fell. Fear surged in him.

He rested against the tank. When he was calmer, he again threw the anchor. He made half a dozen tries, but each time it came sliding back. He didn't have quite the angle he needed to get the anchor to the crown where the spike was. There was simply no way to do it. He had to tie the bandanna to the railing and climb down.

Another idea nagged him. He shook his head as if he'd been asked. He didn't want to step up onto the railing. He'd be crazy to do it. He could, of course, use part of his line to tie himself. Thus if he slipped, he wouldn't fall far.

He wrapped the nylon line twice around



WATCHTOWER 1984  
Sigmar Polke Private collection.

his waist. He knotted the middle section to one of the upright supports of the railing.

Cautiously, like a performer mounting the high wire, he stepped up onto the pipe railing. He rested a hand against the tank so that any fall would be toward the catwalk. His left foot dangled. Though his body wished to bend, he straightened it. He was sweating, and the anchor was wet in his grip. He blinked to clear his eyes, being careful not to turn his head toward where he might look down.

He hefted the anchor and with a gentle, looping motion arched it over himself. The anchor slid back and struck him in the side of the face. Standing on the railing, he was

unable to dodge. His head throbbed and ached. He touched his cheek, and his hand came away bloody.

He pulled the anchor up from the catwalk. This time he didn't throw it directly over him. When he tugged on the line, the anchor came down. He felt weak and sick.

He balanced the anchor, tossed it, and jerked the line. The anchor did not come back. He jumped to the catwalk and pulled. The anchor held.

He couldn't be certain it was caught on the spike. Perhaps a hook tip was in a seam or had snagged a bolt. He hung all his weight on the line, drawing up his feet to do so. Next he untied the line from the railing sup-

THE WAY UP

port. He dried his hands on his sweat suit and wiped his mouth.

With a great effort, he pulled himself up. When he reached the rounded curve of the roof, he worked his hands under the line that his weight stretched tight. Nausea pumped through him as he bruised his knuckles on the steel. Grunting, he made a final thrust of his body and lay flat against the slope.

His heart beat hard. He sweated yet felt cold in the gusting wind. He raised his head to look at the top of the tower. Two prongs of the anchor had caught the spike.

He crawled up. Because of the slope and his tennis shoes, he could have done it without a line. He lay on his side as he took off the bandanna. He tied the bandanna high on the spike. He tested to make certain the bandanna would not blow loose.

## *Fear ballooned in him, and he shook harder.*

To go down, he merely let his body slide against the steel. He braked himself by gripping the line. His feet jarred against the catwalk. He hated leaving his anchor, but he knew of no way to pull it free. With his knife, he cut the line as high as he could reach. He wound what was left of it around his body and opened the trap door.

As he put a foot on the ladder, a gust of wind caught his cap and blew it off. He snatched for the cap but missed. It fluttered dizzily down and down and down. He couldn't stop looking. The cap seemed to fall forever. He felt the pull of space. He'd tumble the same way if he slipped. He began to shake. He was too weak to climb

down that great distance. He backed off.

Fear ballooned in him, and he shook harder. He couldn't stop thinking of the boy who'd gotten stalled halfway up and needed the Richmond rescue squad. The terrible disgrace of it—the sirens, the people gathered around, and the spotlight swinging up. The police would call his parents.

Yet he was unable to force himself to the ladder. The grip was gone from his fingers, and his body was limp. He might climb down a few steps and not be able to hold. He had the sensation of falling, like the cap, of cartwheeling end over end to the ground. He lay flat on the catwalk, his face against steel strips. He was shaking so badly that his temple knocked against the metal.

He gave himself up to fear. As if his mouth had a life of its own, yells came out. He couldn't stop the sounds. He shouted for help. He screamed and begged in a rush of terror.

The wind carried his voice away. Even if he was missed at home and searched for, nobody would think of looking on the tower. He'd have to lie on the catwalk all night. . . . No, he couldn't! With his flashlight he signaled toward the school. There was no response from the watchman. Jamie kept yelling until his voice became faint and hoarse. He wept.

The fright in him was gradually replaced by exhaustion. He lay panting. He felt the heat of shame. He thought of Alf, Nick, and Jawbone seeing him like this. He thought of his parents. Like a person gone blind, he groped for the trap door.

This time he didn't allow himself to look down. Instead he rolled his eyes upward. His fingers measured the position of the hole, and he lowered a trembling foot to a

### *Words to Know and Use*

**nausea** (nō' shə) *n.* a feeling of sickness in the stomach accompanied by the urge to vomit

rung. As if decrepit, he shifted his weight onto the ladder.

He went down a step. He was holding the rungs too tightly, and his sweating hands made the steel slippery. He felt the pull of space behind him. His breathing was rapid and shallow. He moved the way a small child would, using the same foot first on each rung.

He closed his eyes. His body functioned with no direction from him. He was a passenger cowering inside.

He rested, hanging his armpits over the ladder and leaning his forehead against the steel. For an instant he was drunkenly comfortable. He wobbled on the ladder, almost letting go. He caught himself and cried out.

Again he started down. In the endlessness of his descent, he didn't believe he would ever get to the bottom. His hands would fail, and he would drop off. He imagined his body curving to the ground.

He stopped on the ladder, not understanding. The fact that his foot swung under him and found no support meant nothing. He believed his tiredness had tricked him. A second time he put out the foot. Like one coming from a cave into sunlight, he opened his eyes and squinted. He saw the dark shapes of trees. He was at the base of the ladder. Lying under the tower was his cap.

Wearily, even calmly now, he untied the line from his waist and knotted it to the bottom rung. He wrapped the line around his wrists. He slid down, but he was too weak to brake himself effectively. The line burned his skin. When he hit the ground, he fell backward. He lay looking at the silver tower shining above him.

Using one of the tubular steel legs for support, he pulled himself up, staggered, and stooped for his cap. He turned to get his bearings before stumbling into a jogging run. At the trees he wove to a stop and again looked at the tower. He shuddered.

He breathed deeply. Straightening, he entered the dark woods with the step of a man who wouldn't be hurried and walked back toward the house.

## I N S I G H T

### Thumbprint

EVE MERRIAM

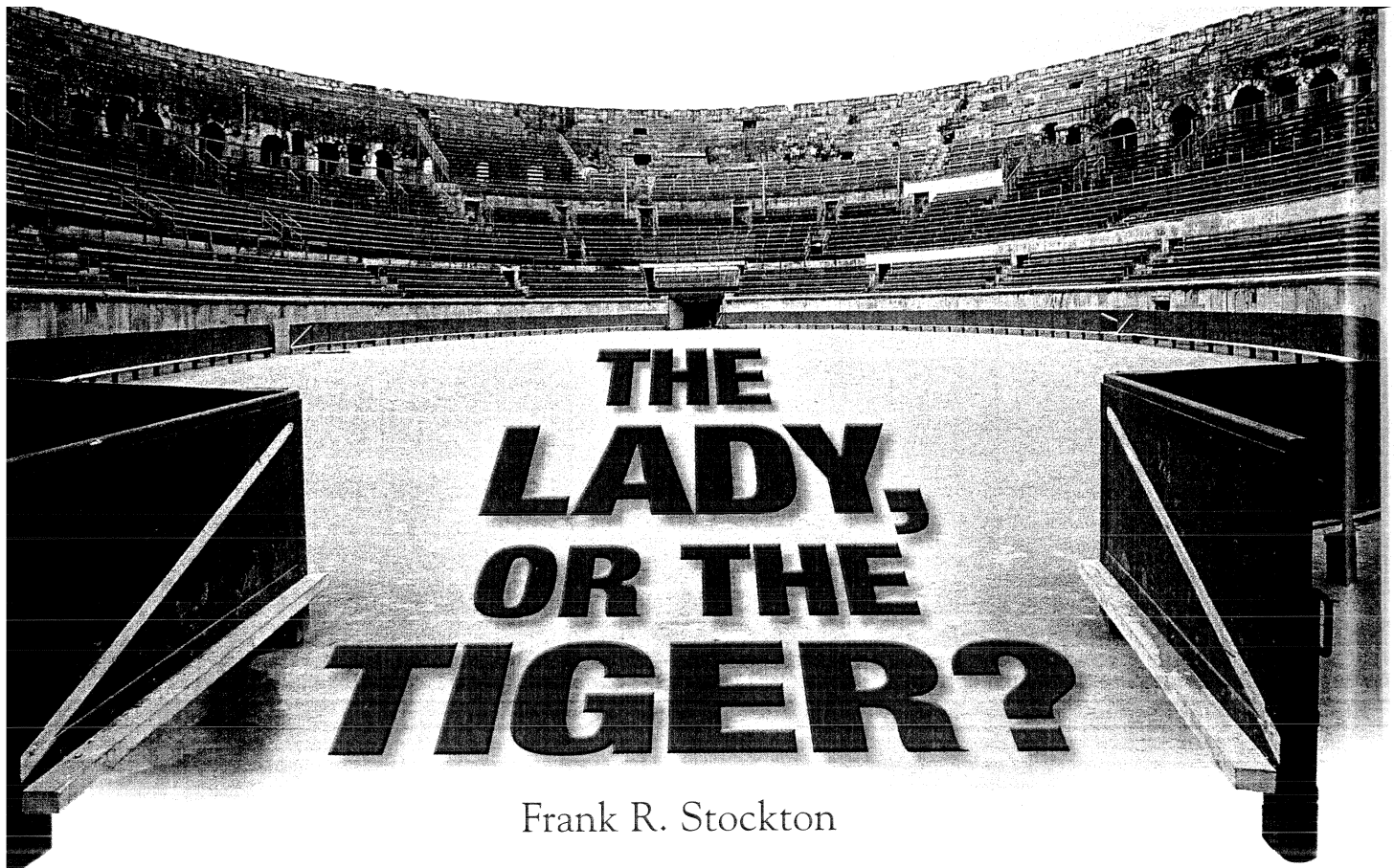
In the heel of my thumb  
are whorls, whirls, wheels  
in a unique design:  
mine alone.

What a treasure to own!  
My own flesh, my own feelings.  
No other, however grand or base,  
can ever contain the same.  
My signature,  
thumbing the pages of my time.  
My universe key,  
my singularity.  
Impress, implant,  
I am myself,  
of all my atom parts I am the sum.  
And out of my blood and my brain  
I make my own interior weather,  
my own sun and rain.  
Imprint my mark upon the world,  
whatever I shall become.

#### Words to Know and Use

**decrepit** (dē krep' it) *adj.* worn out by old age, illness, or long use; weak, frail, feeble  
**cowering** (kou' er in) *adj.* crouching and trembling out of fear; cringing **cower** *v.*  
**descent** (dē sent') *n.* a way down, a going down; a fall





# THE LADY, OR THE TIGER?

Frank R. Stockton

In the very olden time, there lived a semibarbaric king, whose ideas, though somewhat polished and sharpened by the progressiveness of distant Latin neighbors, were still large, florid, and untrammelled,<sup>1</sup> as became the half of him which was barbaric. He was a man of exuberant fancy, and, withal, of an authority so irresistible that, at his will, he turned his varied fancies into facts. He was greatly given to self-communing; and, when he and himself agreed upon any thing, the thing was done. When every member of his domestic and political systems moved smoothly in its appointed course, his nature was bland and genial;<sup>2</sup> but whenever there was a little hitch, and some of his orbs got out of their orbits, he was blander and more genial

still, for nothing pleased him so much as to make the crooked straight, and crush down uneven places.

Among the borrowed notions by which his barbarism had become semified<sup>3</sup> was that of the public arena, in which, by exhibitions of manly and beastly valor, the minds of his subjects were refined and cultured.

But even here the exuberant and barbaric fancy asserted itself.<sup>4</sup> The arena of the king was built, not to give the people an opportunity of hearing the rhapsodies<sup>5</sup> of dying gladiators, nor to enable them to view the inevitable conclusion of a conflict between religious opinions and hungry jaws, but for purposes far better adapted to widen and

1. The king's ideas are somewhat uncivilized (*semibarbaric*); they are very showy (*florid*) and unrestrained (*untrammelled*).

2. The king himself is generally agreeable and mild (*bland*) and pleasantly cheerful (*genial*).

3. *Semified* is a made-up word meaning "reduced in half or made partial."

4. Here, *asserted itself* means "exercised its influence; insisted on being recognized."

5. *Rhapsodies* are enthusiastic expressions of emotion.

Conflict How does this passage suggest a future conflict?



develop the mental energies of the people. This vast amphitheater,<sup>6</sup> with its encircling galleries, its mysterious vaults, and its unseen passages, was an agent of poetic justice, in which crime was punished, or virtue rewarded, by the decrees of an **impartial** and incorruptible chance.

When a subject was accused of a crime of sufficient importance to interest the king, public notice was given that on an appointed day the fate of the accused person would be decided in the king's arena,—a structure which well deserved its name; for, although its form and plan were borrowed from afar, its purpose **emanated** solely from the brain of this man, who, every barley-corn<sup>7</sup> a king, knew no tradition to which he owed more allegiance than pleased his fancy, and who ingrafted on every adopted form of human thought and action the rich growth of his barbaric idealism.

When all the people had assembled in the galleries, and the king, surrounded by his court, sat high up on his throne of royal state on one side of the arena, he gave a signal, a door beneath him opened, and the accused subject stepped out into the amphitheater. Directly opposite him, on the other side of the enclosed space, were two doors, exactly alike and side by side. It was the duty and the privilege of the person on trial, to walk directly to these doors and open one of them. He could open either

door he pleased: he was subject to no guidance or influence but that of the aforementioned impartial and incorruptible chance. If he opened the one, there came out of it a hungry tiger, the fiercest and most cruel that could be procured, which immediately sprang upon him, and tore him to pieces, as a punishment for his guilt. The moment that the case of the criminal was thus decided, doleful iron bells were clanged, great wails went up from the hired mourners posted on the outer rim of the arena, and the vast audience, with bowed heads and downcast hearts, wended slowly their homeward way, mourning greatly that one so young and fair, or so old and respected, should have merited so **dire** a fate.

But, if the accused person opened the other door, there came forth from it a lady, the most suitable to his years and station that his majesty could select among his fair subjects; and to this lady he was immediately married, as a reward of his innocence. It mattered not that he might already possess a wife and family, or that his affections might be engaged upon an object of his own selection: the king allowed no such subordinate arrangements to interfere with his great scheme of retribution and reward.<sup>8</sup> The exercises, as in the other instance, took place immediately, and in the arena. Another door opened beneath the king, and a priest, followed by a band of choristers, and dancing maidens blowing joyous airs on golden horns and treading an epithalamic measure, advanced to

6. An *amphitheater* is a circular structure with rising tiers of seats around a central open space.

7. The *barleycorn* is an old unit of measure equal to the width of one grain of barley—about a third of an inch. This phrase is similar to “every inch a king” and means that he was kingly in every way and in every part, top to bottom.

**Conflict** Based on this passage, what do you think the main conflict will be?

#### Vocabulary

**impartial** (im pār' shəl) *adj.* not favoring one side more than another; fair

**emanate** (em' ə nāt') *v.* to come forth

8. The king's plan for giving out punishment (*retribution*) and reward was of primary importance, and everything else was less important (*subordinate*), including family values.

**Matters of Life and Death** What do these details suggest about the people's view of death and mourning?

#### Vocabulary

**dire** (dīr) *adj.* dreadful; terrible



where the pair stood, side by side; and the wedding was promptly and cheerily solemnized.<sup>9</sup> Then the gay brass bells rang forth their merry peals, the people shouted glad hurrahs, and the innocent man, preceded by children strewing flowers on his path, led his bride to his home.

This was the king's semibarbaric method of administering justice. Its perfect fairness is obvious. The criminal could not know out of which door would come the lady: he opened either he pleased, without having the slightest idea whether, in the next instant, he was to be devoured or married. On some occasions the tiger came out of one door, and on some out of the other. The decisions of this tribunal were not only fair, they were positively determinate:<sup>10</sup> the accused person was instantly punished if he found himself guilty; and, if innocent, he was rewarded on the spot, whether he liked it or not. There was no escape from the judgments of the king's arena.

The institution was a very popular one. When the people gathered together on one of the great trial days, they never knew whether they were to witness a bloody slaughter or a hilarious wedding. This element of uncertainty lent an interest to the occasion which it could not otherwise have attained. Thus, the masses were entertained and pleased, and the thinking part of the community could bring no charge of unfairness against this plan; for did not the accused person have the whole matter in his own hands?

9. *Epithalamic* (ep' ə thə lā' mik) refers to a song in honor of a bride and groom. When a wedding is *solemnized*, it is celebrated with a formal ceremony.

10. Usually, *tribunal* refers to a group of judges or a place of judgment. Here, it is "the king's semibarbaric method of administering justice," and its outcome is absolutely final (*determinate*).

Summarize What is the king's "semibarbaric method of administering justice"?

This semibarbaric king had a daughter as blooming as his most florid fancies, and with a soul as **fervent** and imperious<sup>11</sup> as his own. As is usual in such cases, she was the apple of his eye, and was loved by him above all humanity. Among his courtiers was a young man of that fineness of blood and lowness of station common to the conventional heroes of romance who love royal maidens. This royal maiden was well satisfied with her lover, for he was handsome and brave to a degree unsurpassed in all this kingdom; and she loved him with an ardor<sup>12</sup> that had enough of barbarism in it to make it exceedingly warm and strong. This love affair moved on happily for many months, until one day the king happened to discover its existence. He did not hesitate nor waver in regard to his duty in the premises. The youth was immediately cast into prison, and a day was appointed for his trial in the king's arena. This, of course, was an especially important occasion; and his majesty, as well as all the people, was greatly interested in the workings and development of this trial. Never before had such a case occurred; never before had a subject dared to love the daughter of a king. In after-years such things became commonplace enough; but then they were, in no slight degree, **novel** and startling.

The tiger-cages of the kingdom were searched for the most savage and relentless beasts, from which the fiercest monster might be selected for the arena; and the ranks of maiden youth and beauty throughout the land were carefully surveyed by

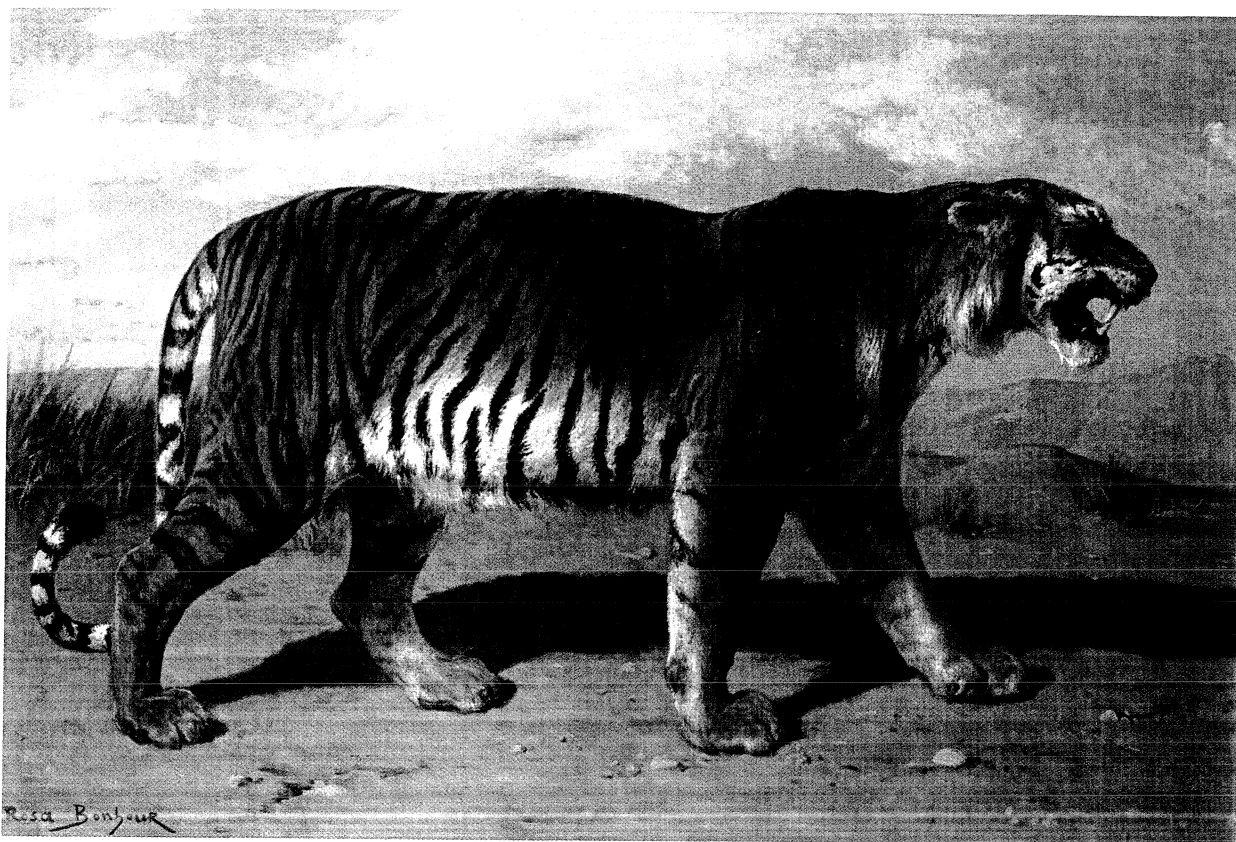
11. To be *imperious* is to be extremely proud and controlling.

12. *Ardor* means intense passion.

#### Vocabulary

**fervent** (fur' vənt) *adj.* having or showing great intensity of feeling; passionate

**novel** (nov' əl) *adj.* new and unusual



*Stalking Tiger*, Rosa Bonheur. Private collection, ©Gavin Graham Gallery, London.

competent judges, in order that the young man might have a fitting bride in case fate did not determine for him a different destiny. Of course, everybody knew that the deed with which the accused was charged had been done. He had loved the princess, and neither he, she, nor any one else thought of denying the fact; but the king would not think of allowing any fact of this kind to interfere with the workings of the tribunal, in which he took such great delight and satisfaction. No matter how the affair turned out, the youth would be disposed of; and the king would take an aesthetic pleasure in watching the course of events, which would determine whether or not the young man had done wrong in allowing himself to love the princess.

The appointed day arrived. From far and near the people gathered, and thronged the

great galleries of the arena; and crowds, unable to gain admittance, massed themselves against its outside walls. The king and his court were in their places, opposite the twin doors,—those fateful portals, so terrible in their similarity.

All was ready. The signal was given. A door beneath the royal party opened, and the lover of the princess walked into the arena. Tall, beautiful, fair, his appearance was greeted with a low hum of admiration and anxiety. Half the audience had not known so grand a youth had lived among them. No wonder the princess loved him! What a terrible thing for him to be there!

As the youth advanced into the arena, he turned, as the custom was, to bow to the king; but he did not think at all of that royal personage; his eyes were fixed upon the princess, who sat to the right of her father.

Had it not been for the moiety<sup>13</sup> of barbarism in her nature, it is probable that lady would not have been there; but her intense and fervid soul would not allow her to be absent on an occasion in which she was so terribly interested. From the moment that the decree had gone forth, that her lover should decide his fate in the king's arena, she had thought of nothing, night or day, but this great event and the various subjects connected with it. Possessed of more power, influence, and force of character than any one who had ever before been interested in such a case, she had done what no other person had done—she had possessed herself of the secret of the doors. She knew in which of the two rooms, that lay behind those doors, stood the cage of the tiger, with its open front, and in which waited the lady. Through these thick doors, heavily curtained with skins on the inside, it was impossible that any noise or suggestion should come from within to the person who should approach to raise the latch of one of them; but gold, and the power of a woman's will, had brought the secret to the princess.

And not only did she know in which room stood the lady ready to emerge, all blushing and radiant, should her door be opened, but she knew who the lady was. It was one of the fairest and loveliest of the damsels of the court who had been selected as the reward of the accused youth, should he be proved innocent of the crime of aspiring to one so far above him; and the princess hated her. Often had she seen, or imagined that she had seen, this fair creature throwing glances of admiration upon the person of her lover, and sometimes she thought these glances were perceived and

even returned. Now and then she had seen them talking together; it was but for a moment or two, but much can be said in a brief space; it may have been on most unimportant topics, but how could she know that? The girl was lovely, but she had dared to raise her eyes to the loved one of the princess; and, with all the intensity of the savage blood transmitted to her through long lines of wholly barbaric ancestors, she hated the woman who blushed and trembled behind that silent door.

When her lover turned and looked at her, and his eye met hers as she sat there paler and whiter than any one in the vast ocean of anxious faces about her, he saw, by that power of quick perception which is given to those whose souls are one, that she knew behind which door crouched the tiger, and behind which stood the lady. He had expected her to know it. He understood her nature, and his soul was assured that she would never rest until she had made plain to herself this thing, hidden to all other lookers-on, even to the king. The only hope for the youth in which there was any element of certainty was based upon the success of the princess in discovering this mystery; and the moment he looked upon her, he saw she had succeeded, as in his soul he knew she would succeed.

Then it was that his quick and anxious glance asked the question: "Which?" It was as plain to her as if he shouted it from where he stood. There was not an instant to be lost. The question was asked in a flash; it must be answered in another.

Her right arm lay on the cushioned parapet<sup>14</sup> before her. She raised her hand, and made a slight, quick movement toward the

13. *Moiety* (moi' ə tē) means "half."

**Conflict** How does this passage advance the central conflict of the story?

14. Here, the *parapet* is a low wall or railing around the royal "box seats."

**Summarize** Based on this passage, how would you summarize the relationship between the lovers?

right. No one but her lover saw her. Every eye but his was fixed on the man in the arena.

He turned, and with a firm and rapid step he walked across the empty space. Every heart stopped beating, every breath was held, every eye was fixed immovably upon that man. Without the slightest hesitation, he went to the door on the right, and opened it.

Now, the point of the story is this: Did the tiger come out of that door, or did the lady?

The more we reflect upon this question, the harder it is to answer. It involves a study of the human heart which leads us through devious mazes of passion, out of which it is difficult to find our way. Think of it, fair reader, not as if the decision of the question depended upon yourself, but upon that hot-blooded, semibarbaric princess, her soul at a white heat beneath the combined fires of despair and jealousy. She had lost him, but who should have him?

How often, in her waking hours and in her dreams, had she started in wild horror, and covered her face with her hands as she thought of her lover opening the door on the other side of which waited the cruel fangs of the tiger!

But how much oftener had she seen him at the other door! How in her grievous reveries<sup>15</sup> had she gnashed her teeth, and torn her hair, when she saw his start of rapturous delight as he opened the door of the lady! How her soul had burned in agony when she had seen him rush to meet

that woman, with her flushing cheek and sparkling eye of triumph; when she had seen him lead her forth, his whole frame kindled with the joy of recovered life; when she had heard the glad shouts from the multitude, and the wild ringing of the happy bells; when she had seen the priest, with his joyous followers, advance to the couple, and make them man and wife before her very eyes; and when she had seen them walk away together upon their path of flowers, followed by the tremendous shouts of the hilarious multitude, in which her one despairing shriek was lost and drowned!

Would it not be better for him to die at once, and go to wait for her in the blessed regions of semibarbaric futurity?

And yet, that awful tiger, those shrieks, that blood.

Her decision had been indicated in an instant, but it had been made after days and nights of anguished deliberation. She had known she would be asked, she had decided what she would answer, and, without the slightest hesitation, she had moved her hand to the right.

The question of her decision is one not to be lightly considered, and it is not for me to presume<sup>16</sup> to set myself up as the one person able to answer it. And so I leave it with all of you: Which came out of the opened door— the lady, or the tiger? ☹

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15. Something that is *grievous* causes great grief or worry; *reveries* are daydreams.

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16. *Presume* means "to take upon oneself without permission" or "to dare."

**Matters of Life and Death** *How does this passage suggest that the trial feels like a matter of life and death for the princess?*

15



*A Hunter in the Cuban Jungle, Sunrise, 1869. Henri Cleenewerck. Oil on canvas, 96.8 x 82.5 cm. Private collection.*

# THE Most Dangerous GAME

Richard Connell

Off there to the right—somewhere—is a large island,” said Whitney. “It’s rather a mystery—”

“What island is it?” Rainsford asked.

“The old charts call it ‘Ship-Trap Island’,” Whitney replied. “A suggestive name, isn’t it? Sailors have a curious dread of the place. I don’t know why. Some superstition—”

“Can’t see it,” remarked Rainsford, trying to peer through the dank tropical night that was palpable as it pressed its thick warm blackness in upon the yacht.

“You’ve good eyes,” said Whitney, with a laugh, “and I’ve seen you pick off a moose moving in the brown fall bush at four hundred yards, but even you can’t see four miles or so through a moonless Caribbean night.”

“Nor four yards,” admitted Rainsford. “Ugh! It’s like moist black velvet.”

“It will be light enough in Rio,” promised Whitney. “We should make it in a few days. I hope the jaguar guns have come from Purdey’s. We should have some good hunting up the Amazon. Great sport, hunting.”

“The best sport in the world,” agreed Rainsford.

“For the hunter,” amended Whitney. “Not for the jaguar.”

“Don’t talk rot, Whitney,” said Rainsford. “You’re a big-game hunter, not a philosopher. Who cares how a jaguar feels?”

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Matters of Life and Death *What does Whitney’s statement suggest about his view of hunting?*



"Perhaps the jaguar does," observed Whitney.

"Bah! They've no understanding."

"Even so, I rather think they understand one thing—fear. The fear of pain and the fear of death."

"Nonsense," laughed Rainsford. "This hot weather is making you soft, Whitney. Be a realist. The world is made up of two classes—the hunters and the huntees. Luckily, you and I are hunters. Do you think we've passed that island yet?"

"I can't tell in the dark. I hope so."

"Why?" asked Rainsford.

"The place has a reputation—a bad one."

"Cannibals?" suggested Rainsford.

"Hardly. Even cannibals wouldn't live in such a God-forsaken place. But it's gotten into sailor lore,<sup>1</sup> somehow. Didn't you notice that the crew's nerves seemed a bit jumpy today?"

"They were a bit strange, now you mention it. Even Captain Nielsen—"

"Yes, even that tough-minded old Swede, who'd go up to the devil himself and ask him for a light. Those fishy blue eyes held a look I never saw there before. All I could get out of him was: 'This place has an evil name among seafaring men, sir.' Then he said to me, very gravely: 'Don't you feel anything?'—as if the air about us was actually poisonous. Now, you mustn't laugh when I tell you this—I did feel something like a sudden chill."

"There was no breeze. The sea was as flat as a plate-glass window. We were drawing near the island then. What I felt

was a—a mental chill; a sort of sudden dread."

"Pure imagination," said Rainsford.

"One superstitious sailor can taint the whole ship's company with his fear."

"Maybe. But sometimes I think sailors have an extra sense that tells them when they are in danger. Sometimes I think evil is a **tangible** thing—with wave lengths, just as sound and light have. An evil place can, so to speak, broadcast vibrations of evil. Anyhow, I'm glad we're getting out of this zone. Well, I think I'll turn in now, Rainsford."

"I'm not sleepy," said Rainsford. "I'm going to smoke another pipe up on the afterdeck."

"Good night, then, Rainsford. See you at breakfast."

"Right. Good night, Whitney."

There was no sound in the night as Rainsford sat there but the muffled throb of the engine that drove the yacht swiftly through the darkness, and the swish and ripple of the wash of the propeller.

Rainsford, reclining in a steamer chair, indolently puffed on his favorite briar.<sup>2</sup> The sensuous drowsiness of the night was upon him. "It's so dark," he thought, "that I could sleep without closing my eyes; the night would be my eyelids—"

An abrupt sound startled him. Off to the right he heard it, and his ears, expert in such matters, could not be mistaken. Again he heard the sound, and again. Somewhere, off in the blackness, someone had fired a gun three times.

1. Traditions and beliefs that have grown over time about a particular subject are called *lore*.

*Make and Verify Predictions About Plot* What do you think will happen, and what clues help you make this prediction?

*Suspense* How does this statement generate suspense?

2. *Indolently* means "lazily"; a *briar* is a tobacco pipe made from the fine-grained wood of the root of a Mediterranean shrub.

#### Vocabulary

**tangible** (tan' jə bəl) *adj.* capable of being touched or felt

Rainsford sprang up and moved quickly to the rail, mystified. He strained his eyes in the direction from which the reports had come, but it was like trying to see through a blanket. He leaped upon the rail and balanced himself there, to get greater elevation; his pipe, striking a rope, was knocked from his mouth. He lunged for it; a short, hoarse cry came from his lips as he realized he had reached too far and had lost his balance. The cry was pinched off short as the blood-warm waters of the Caribbean Sea closed over his head.

He struggled up to the surface and tried to cry out, but the wash from the speeding yacht slapped him in the face and the salt water in his open mouth made him gag and strangle. Desperately he struck out with strong strokes after the receding lights of the yacht, but he stopped before he had swum fifty feet. A certain cool-headedness had come to him; it was not the first time he had been in a tight place. There was a chance that his cries could be heard by someone aboard the yacht, but that chance was slender, and grew more slender as the yacht raced on. He wrestled himself out of his clothes, and shouted with all his power. The lights of the yacht became faint and ever-vanishing fireflies; then they were blotted out entirely by the night.

Rainsford remembered the shots. They had come from the right, and doggedly he swam in that direction, swimming with slow, deliberate strokes, conserving his strength. For a seemingly endless time he fought the sea. He began to count his strokes; he could do possibly a hundred more and then—

Rainsford heard a sound. It came out of the darkness, a high screaming sound, the

sound of an animal in an extremity of anguish and terror.

He did not recognize the animal that made the sound; he did not try to; with fresh vitality he swam toward the sound. He heard it again; then it was cut short by another noise, crisp, staccato.

"Pistol shot," muttered Rainsford, swimming on.

Ten minutes of determined effort brought another sound to his ears—the most welcome he had ever heard—the muttering and growling of the sea breaking on a rocky shore. He was almost on the rocks before he saw them; on a night less calm he would have been shattered against them. With his remaining strength he dragged himself from the swirling waters. Jagged crags appeared to jut up into the opaqueness;<sup>3</sup> he forced himself upward, hand over hand. Gasping, his hands raw, he reached a flat place at the top. Dense jungle came down to the very edge of the cliffs. What perils that tangle of trees and underbrush might hold for him did not concern Rainsford just then. All he knew was that he was safe from his enemy, the sea, and that utter weariness was upon him. He flung himself down at the jungle edge and tumbled headlong into the deepest sleep of his life.

When he opened his eyes he knew from the position of the sun that it was late in the afternoon. Sleep had given him new vigor; a sharp hunger was picking at him. He looked about him, almost cheerfully.

"Where there are pistol shots, there are men. Where there are men, there is food," he thought. But what kind of men, he

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3. *Crags* are steep, rugged, protruding rocks or cliffs. Here, the crags jut up into the darkness (*opaqueness*) of the night.

Matters of Life and Death *Why does the pistol shot stop the sound?*

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Make and Verify Predictions About Plot *What do you think will happen to Rainsford?*



wondered, in so forbidding a place? An unbroken front of snarled and ragged jungle fringed the shore.

He saw no sign of a trail through the closely knit web of weeds and trees; it was easier to go along the shore, and Rainsford floundered along by the water. Not far from where he had landed, he stopped.

Some wounded thing, by the evidence, a large animal, had thrashed about in the underbrush; the jungle weeds were crushed down and the moss was lacerated; one patch of weeds was stained crimson. A small, glittering object not far away caught Rainsford's eye and he picked it up. It was an empty cartridge.

"A twenty-two," he remarked. "That's odd. It must have been a fairly large animal, too. The hunter had his nerve with him to tackle it with a light gun. It's clear that the brute put up a fight. I suppose the first three shots I heard was when the hunter flushed his quarry<sup>4</sup> and wounded it. The last shot was when he trailed it here and finished it."

He examined the ground closely and found what he had hoped to find—the print of hunting boots. They pointed along the cliff in the direction he had been going. Eagerly he hurried along, now slipping on a rotten log or a loose stone, but making headway; night was beginning to settle down on the island.

Bleak darkness was blacking out the sea and jungle when Rainsford sighted the lights. He came upon them as he turned a crook in the coast line, and his first thought was that he had come upon a village, for there were many lights. But as he forged along he saw to his great astonishment that all the lights were in one enormous build-

4. *Quarry* is anything that is hunted or pursued, especially an animal.

Suspense *How does the author's word choice add suspense in this passage?*

ing—a lofty structure with pointed towers plunging upward into the gloom. His eyes made out the shadowy outlines of a palatial chateau;<sup>5</sup> it was set on a high bluff, and on three sides of it cliffs dived down to where the sea licked greedy lips in the shadows.

"Mirage," thought Rainsford. But it was no mirage, he found, when he opened the tall spiked iron gate. The stone steps were real enough; the massive door with a leering gargoyle for a knocker was real enough; yet above it all hung an air of unreality.

He lifted the knocker, and it creaked up stiffly, as if it had never before been used. He let it fall, and it startled him with its booming loudness. He thought he heard steps within; the door remained closed. Again Rainsford lifted the heavy knocker, and let it fall. The door opened then, opened as suddenly as if it were on a spring, and Rainsford stood blinking in the river of glaring gold light that poured out. The first thing Rainsford's eyes **discerned** was the largest man Rainsford had ever seen—a gigantic creature, solidly made and black-bearded to the waist. In his hand the man held a long-barreled revolver, and he was pointing it straight at Rainsford's heart.

Out of the snarl of beard two small eyes regarded Rainsford.

"Don't be alarmed," said Rainsford, with a smile which he hoped was disarming.<sup>6</sup>



**Visual Vocabulary**  
A *gargoyle* is an outlandish or grotesque carved figure.

5. A *palatial chateau* (sha tō') is a magnificent, palace-like mansion.

6. *Disarming* means "tending to remove fear or suspicion; charming."

#### Vocabulary

**discern** (di surn') v. to detect or recognize; to make out



*Le Château Noir*, 1904–1906. Paul Cézanne. Oil on canvas, 29 x 36¾ in. Gift of Mrs. David M. Levy. The Museum of Modern Art, NY.

**View the Art** This painting depicts a real building that was owned by a man who manufactured black paint. Legend believed he was involved in black magic and so called the building “the black chateau.” Compare and contrast this chateau with the chateau described in the story.

“I’m no robber. I fell off a yacht. My name is Sanger Rainsford of New York City.”

The menacing look in the eyes did not change. The revolver pointed as rigidly as if the giant were a statue. He gave no sign that he understood Rainsford’s words, or that he had even heard them. He was dressed in uniform, a black uniform trimmed with gray astrakhan.<sup>7</sup>

“I’m Sanger Rainsford of New York,” Rainsford began again. “I fell off a yacht. I am hungry.”

The man’s only answer was to raise with his thumb the hammer of his revolver. Then Rainsford saw the man’s free hand go to his forehead in a military salute, and he saw him click his heels together and stand at attention. Another man was coming down the broad marble steps, an erect, slender man in evening clothes. He advanced to Rainsford and held out his hand.

In a cultivated voice marked by a slight accent that gave it added precision and deliberateness, he said: “It is a very great pleasure and honor to welcome Mr. Sanger Rainsford, the celebrated hunter, to my home.”

7. *Astrakhan* is the woolly skin of young lambs and is named after a region in Russia.

Automatically Rainsford shook the man's hand.

"I've read your book about hunting snow leopards in Tibet, you see," explained the man. "I am General Zaroff."

Rainsford's first impression was that the man was singularly handsome; his second was that there was an original, almost bizarre quality about the general's face. He was a tall man past middle age, for his hair was a vivid white; but his thick eyebrows and pointed military mustache were as black as the night from which Rainsford had come. His eyes, too, were black and very bright. He had high cheek bones, a sharp-cut nose, a spare, dark face, the face of a man used to giving orders, the face of an aristocrat. Turning to the giant in uniform, the general made a sign. The giant put away his pistol, saluted, withdrew.

"Ivan is an incredibly strong fellow," remarked the general, "but he has the misfortune to be deaf and dumb. A simple fellow, but, I'm afraid, like all his race, a bit of a savage."

"Is he Russian?"

"He is a Cossack,"<sup>8</sup> said the general, and his smile showed red lips and pointed teeth. "So am I."

"Come," he said, "we shouldn't be chatting here. We can talk later. Now you want clothes, food, rest. You shall have them. This is a most restful spot."

Ivan had reappeared, and the general spoke to him with lips that moved but gave forth no sound.

"Follow Ivan, if you please, Mr. Rainsford," said the general. "I was about

to have my dinner when you came. I'll wait for you. You'll find that my clothes will fit you, I think."

It was to a huge, beam-ceilinged bedroom with a canopied bed big enough for six men that Rainsford followed the silent giant. Ivan laid out an evening suit, and Rainsford, as he put it on, noticed that it came from a London tailor who ordinarily cut and sewed for none below the rank of duke.

The dining room to which Ivan conducted them was in many ways remarkable. There was a medieval magnificence about it; it suggested a baronial hall of feudal times with its oaken panels, its high ceiling, its vast refectory tables where twoscore men could sit down to eat.<sup>9</sup> About the hall were the mounted heads of many animals—lions, tigers, elephants, moose, bears; larger or more perfect specimens Rainsford had never seen. At the great table the general was sitting, alone.

"You'll have a cocktail, Mr. Rainsford," he suggested. The cocktail was surpassingly good; and, Rainsford noticed, the table appointments were of the finest—the linen, the crystal, the silver, the china.

They were eating *borscht*, the rich, red soup with whipped cream so dear to Russian palates. Half apologetically General Zaroff said: "We do our best to preserve the amenities of civilization here."<sup>10</sup> Please forgive any lapses. We are well off the beaten track, you know. Do you think the champagne has suffered from its long ocean trip?"

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8. The Cossacks are a people of southern Russia (and, now, Kazakhstan). During czarist times, Cossack men were famous as horsemen in the Russian cavalry.

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9. The words *medieval*, *baronial*, and *feudal* all relate to the Middle Ages. A *refectory table* might be found in a baron's castle; it is a long, wooden table with straight, heavy legs.

10. *Borscht* (bōrsht) is a soup made from beets. Here, *palates* means "tastes" or "likings," and *amenities* means "agreeable features" or "niceties."

Make and Verify Predictions About Plot What do you predict will happen between Rainsford and General Zaroff?

Matters of Life and Death What do all the mounted heads tell you about Zaroff?

"Not in the least," declared Rainsford. He was finding the general a most thoughtful and affable host, a true cosmopolite.<sup>11</sup> But there was one small trait of the general's that made Rainsford uncomfortable. Whenever he looked up from his plate he found the general studying him, appraising him narrowly.

"Perhaps," said General Zaroff, "you were surprised that I recognized your name. You see, I read all books on hunting published in English, French, and Russian. I have but one passion in my life, Mr. Rainsford, and it is the hunt."



**Visual Vocabulary**  
The African Cape buffalo is a large, often fierce buffalo with heavy curving horns.

"You have some wonderful heads here," said Rainsford as he ate a particularly well cooked *filet mignon*. "That Cape buffalo is the largest I ever saw."

"Oh, that fellow. Yes, he was a monster."

"Did he charge you?"

"Hurled me against a tree," said the general. "Fractured my skull. But I got the brute."

"I've always thought," said Rainsford, "that the Cape buffalo is the most dangerous of all big game."

For a moment the general did not reply; he was smiling his curious red-lipped smile. Then he said slowly: "No. You are wrong, sir. The Cape buffalo is not the most dangerous big game." He sipped his wine. "Here in my preserve on this island," he said in the same slow tone, "I hunt more dangerous game."

Rainsford expressed his surprise. "Is there big game on this island?"

The general nodded. "The biggest."

"Really?"

"Oh, it isn't here naturally, of course. I have to stock the island."

"What have you imported, general?" Rainsford asked. "Tigers?"

The general smiled. "No," he said. "Hunting tigers ceased to interest me some years ago. I exhausted their possibilities, you see. No thrill left in tigers, no real danger. I live for danger, Mr. Rainsford."

The general took from his pocket a gold cigarette case and offered his guest a long black cigarette with a silver tip; it was perfumed and gave off a smell like incense.

"We will have some capital hunting, you and I," said the general. "I shall be most glad to have your society."

"But what game—" began Rainsford.

"I'll tell you," said the general. "You will be amused, I know. I think I may say, in all modesty, that I have done a rare thing. I have invented a new sensation. May I pour you another glass of port?"

"Thank you, general."

The general filled both glasses, and said: "God makes some men poets. Some He makes kings, some beggars. Me He made a hunter. My hand was made for the trigger, my father said. He was a very rich man with a quarter of a million acres in the Crimea, and he was an ardent sportsman. When I was only five years old he gave me a little gun, specially made in Moscow for me, to shoot sparrows with. When I shot some of his prize turkeys with it, he did not punish me; he complimented me on my marksmanship. I killed my first bear in the Caucasus<sup>12</sup> when I

11. *Affable* means "friendly and gracious." A *cosmopolite* (kôz mop' ə līt') is a gracious and sophisticated person.

**Suspense** Why do phrases about dangerous game heighten the suspense?

12. *Crimea* (krī mē' ə) is a region in the southern part of the former Russian empire near the Black Sea. *Caucasus* (kô' kə səs) refers to both a region and a mountain range between the Black and Caspian Seas.



was ten. My whole life has been one prolonged hunt. I went into the army—it was expected of noblemen's sons—and for a time commanded a division of Cossack cavalry, but my real interest was always the hunt. I have hunted every kind of game in every land. It would be impossible for me to tell you how many animals I have killed."

The general puffed at his cigarette.

"After the debacle in Russia I left the country, for it was imprudent for an officer of the Czar to stay there.<sup>13</sup> Many noble Russians lost everything. I, luckily, had invested heavily in American securities, so I shall never have to open a tearoom in Monte Carlo or drive a taxi in Paris. Naturally, I continued to hunt—grizzlies in your Rockies, crocodile in the Ganges, rhinoceroses in East Africa. It was in Africa that the Cape buffalo hit me and laid me up for six months. As soon as I recovered I started for the Amazon to hunt jaguars, for I had heard they were unusually cunning. They weren't." The Cossack sighed. "They were no match at all for a hunter with his wits about him, and a high-powered rifle. I was bitterly disappointed. I was lying in my tent with a splitting headache one night when a terrible thought pushed its way into my mind. Hunting was beginning to bore me! And hunting, remember, had been my life. I have heard that in America business men often go to pieces when they give up the business that has been their life."

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13. A *debacle* (di bā' kəl) is a disastrous defeat. Zaroff refers to the 1917 revolution that overthrew the Czar, an event that made it unwise (*imprudent*) for him to stay in Russia.

Matters of Life and Death What general statement could you make about General Zaroff's life goals?

"Yes, that's so," said Rainsford.

The general smiled. "I had no wish to go to pieces," he said. "I must do something. Now, mine is an analytical mind, Mr. Rainsford. Doubtless that is why I enjoy the problems of the chase."

"No doubt, General Zaroff."

"So," continued the general, "I asked myself why the hunt no longer fascinated me. You are much younger than I am, Mr. Rainsford, and have not hunted as much, but you perhaps can guess the answer."

"What was it?"

"Simply this: hunting had ceased to be what you call 'a sporting proposition.' It had become too easy. I always got my quarry. Always. There is no greater bore than perfection."

The general lit a fresh cigarette.

"No animal had a chance with me any more. That is no boast; it is a mathematical certainty. The animal had nothing

but his legs and his instinct. Instinct is no match for reason. When I thought of this it was a tragic moment for me, I can tell you."

Rainsford leaned across the table, absorbed in what his host was saying.

"It came to me as an inspiration what I must do," the general went on.

"And that was?"

The general smiled the quiet smile of one who has faced an obstacle and surmounted it with success. "I had to invent a new animal to hunt," he said.

"A new animal? You're joking."

"Not at all," said the general. "I never joke about hunting. I needed a new animal. I found one. So I bought this island, built this house, and here I do my hunting. The

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Suspense How does General Zaroff build suspense in the telling of his story?

(23)

island is perfect for my purposes—there are jungles with a maze of trails in them, hills, swamps—”

“But the animal, General Zaroff?”

“Oh,” said the general, “it supplies me with the most exciting hunting in the world. No other hunting compares with it for an instant. Every day I hunt, and I never grow bored now, for I have a quarry with which I can match my wits.”

Rainsford’s bewilderment showed in his face.

“I wanted the ideal animal to hunt,” explained the general. “So I said: ‘What are the attributes of an ideal quarry?’ And the answer was, of course: ‘It must have courage, cunning, and, above all, it must be able to reason.’”

“But no animal can reason,” objected Rainsford.

“My dear fellow,” said the general, “there is one that can.”

“But you can’t mean—” gasped Rainsford.

“And why not?”

“I can’t believe you are serious, General Zaroff. This is a grisly joke.”

“Why should I not be serious? I am speaking of hunting.”

“Hunting? Good God, General Zaroff, what you speak of is murder.”

The general laughed with entire good nature. He regarded Rainsford quizzically. “I refuse to believe that so modern and civilized a young man as you seem to be harbors romantic ideas about the value of human life. Surely your experiences in the war—”

“Did not make me **condone** cold-blooded murder,” finished Rainsford stiffly.

Laughter shook the general. “How extraordinarily droll you are!” he said.

“One does not expect nowadays to find a young man of the educated class, even in America, with such a naive, and, if I may say so, mid-Victorian<sup>14</sup> point of view. It’s like finding a snuff-box in a limousine. Ah, well, doubtless you had Puritan ancestors. So many Americans appear to have had. I’ll wager you’ll forget your notions when you go hunting with me. You’ve a genuine new thrill in store for you, Mr. Rainsford.”

“Thank you, I’m a hunter, not a murderer.”

“Dear me,” said the general, quite unruffled, “again that unpleasant word. But I think I can show you that your scruples<sup>15</sup> are quite ill founded.”

“Yes?”

“Life is for the strong, to be lived by the strong, and, if needs be, taken by the strong. The weak of the world were put here to give the strong pleasure. I am strong. Why should I not use my fist? If I wish to hunt, why should I not? I hunt the scum of the earth—sailors from tramp ships—lascars, blacks, Chinese, whites, mongrels<sup>16</sup>—a thoroughbred horse or hound is worth more than a score of them.”

“But they are men,” said Rainsford hotly.

“Precisely,” said the general. “That is why I use them. It gives me pleasure. They can reason, after a fashion. So they are dangerous.”

“But where do you get them?”

The general’s left eyelid fluttered down in a wink. “This island is called Ship-Trap,” he answered. “Sometimes an angry god of the high seas sends them to me. Sometimes, when Providence is not so

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Make and Verify Predictions About Plot *What animal do you think Zaroff will name?*

#### Vocabulary

**condone** (kən dōn') *v.* to excuse or overlook an offense, usually a serious one, without criticism

- 
14. Zaroff feels that Rainsford is quaint (*droll*), innocent and unsophisticated (*naive*), and old-fashioned (*mid-Victorian*).
  15. *Scruples* are beliefs about the morality or ethics of an act. To have scruples means you will not do something you believe is wrong.
  16. *Lascars* are sailors from India. Zaroff uses the word *mongrel* to refer to people of mixed heritage.

kind, I help Providence a bit. Come to the window with me."

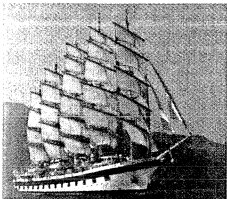
Rainsford went to the window and looked out toward the sea.

"Watch! Out there!" exclaimed the general, pointing into the night. Rainsford's eyes saw only blackness, and then, as the general pressed a button, far out to sea Rainsford saw the flash of lights.

The general chuckled. "They indicate a channel," he said, "where there's none; giant rocks with razor edges crouch like a sea monster with wide-open jaws. They can crush a ship as easily as I crush this nut." He dropped a walnut on the hardwood floor and brought his heel grinding down on it. "Oh, yes," he said, casually, as if in answer to a question, "I have electricity. We try to be civilized here."

"Civilized? And you shoot down men?"

A trace of anger was in the general's black eyes, but it was there for but a second, and he said, in his most pleasant manner: "Dear me, what a righteous young man you are! I assure you I do not do the thing you suggest. That would be barbarous. I treat these visitors with every consideration. They get plenty of good food and exercise. They get into splendid physical condition. You shall see for yourself tomorrow."



**Visual Vocabulary**

A *bark* has from three to five masts, all but one of which are rigged with four-sided sails. The last mast has both three- and four-sided sails.

condition. You shall see for yourself tomorrow."

"What do you mean?"

"We'll visit my training school," smiled the general. "It's in the cellar. I have about a dozen pupils down there now. They're from the Spanish bark *San Lucar* that had the

bad luck to go on the rocks out there. A very inferior lot, I regret to say. Poor specimens and more accustomed to the deck than to the jungle."

He raised his hand, and Ivan, who served as waiter, brought thick Turkish coffee. Rainsford, with an effort, held his tongue in check.

"It's a game, you see," pursued the general blandly. "I suggest to one of them that we go hunting. I give him a supply of food and an excellent hunting knife. I give him three hours' start. I am to follow, armed only with a pistol of the smallest caliber and range. If my quarry eludes me for three whole days, he wins the game. If I find him"—the general smiled—"he loses."

"Suppose he refuses to be hunted?"

"Oh," said the general, "I give him his option, of course. He need not play that game if he doesn't wish to. If he does not wish to hunt, I turn him over to Ivan. Ivan once had the honor of serving as official knouter<sup>17</sup> to the Great White Czar, and he has his own ideas of sport. Invariably, Mr. Rainsford, invariably they choose the hunt."

"And if they win?"

The smile on the general's face widened. "To date I have not lost," he said. Then he added, hastily: "I don't wish you to think me a braggart, Mr. Rainsford. Many of them afford only the most elementary sort of problem. Occasionally I strike a tartar.<sup>18</sup> One almost did win. I eventually had to use the dogs."

17. As the Czar's *knouter* (nou' tər), Ivan was in charge of administering whippings and torture. A knout is a whip made of leather straps braided together with wires.

18. To *strike a tartar* is to take on someone who is stronger or abler.

Matters of Life and Death What do you think happens to someone who "loses"?

Make and Verify Predictions About Plot How do you think Zaroff will respond?

Suspense How does this statement increase the suspense?





*View the Art* In 1901, Sir George Bulloughs of Lancashire, England, bought the Isle of Rhum for use as a sporting estate. How does his trophy room, shown here, compare to Zaroff's home on Ship-Trap Island?

"The dogs?"

"This way, please. I'll show you."

The general steered Rainsford to a window. The lights from the windows sent a flickering illumination that made grotesque patterns on the courtyard below, and Rainsford could see moving about there a dozen or so huge black shapes; as they turned toward him, their eyes glittered greenly.

"A rather good lot, I think," observed the general. "They are let out at seven every night. If anyone should try to get into my house—or out of it—something extremely regrettable would occur to him." He hummed a snatch of song from the *Folies Bergère*.<sup>19</sup>

19. The *Folies Bergère* (fô lê' ber zher') is a music hall in Paris, famed for its variety shows.

"And now," said the general, "I want to show you my new collection of heads. Will you come with me to the library?"

"I hope," said Rainsford, "that you will excuse me tonight, General Zaroff. I'm really not feeling well."

"Ah, indeed?" the general inquired solicitously.<sup>20</sup> "Well, I suppose that's only natural, after your long swim. You need a good, restful night's sleep. Tomorrow you'll feel like a new man, I'll wager. Then we'll hunt, eh? I've one rather promising prospect—" Rainsford was hurrying from the room.

20. *Solicitously* means "in a caring or concerned manner."

*Suspense* What is particularly foreboding about General Zaroff's statement at this point in the story?



"Sorry you can't go with me tonight," called the general. "I expect rather fair sport—a big, strong black. He looks resourceful—Well, good night, Mr. Rainsford; I hope you have a good night's rest."

The bed was good, and the pajamas of the softest silk and he was tired in every fiber of his being, but nevertheless Rainsford could not quiet his brain with the opiate of sleep. He lay, eyes wide open. Once he thought he heard stealthy steps in the corridor outside his room. He sought to throw open the door; it would not open. He went to the window and looked out. His room was high up in one of the towers. The lights of the chateau were out now, and it was dark and silent, but there was a fragment of sallow moon, and by its wan light he could see, dimly, the courtyard; there, weaving in and out in the pattern of shadow, were black, noiseless forms; the hounds heard him at the window and looked up, expectantly, with their green eyes. Rainsford went back to the bed and lay down. By many methods he tried to put himself to sleep. He had achieved a doze when, just as morning began to come, he heard, far off in the jungle, the faint report of a pistol.

General Zaroff did not appear until luncheon. He was dressed faultlessly in the tweeds of a country squire. He was solicitous about the state of Rainsford's health.

"As for me," sighed the general, "I do not feel so well. I am worried, Mr. Rainsford. Last night I detected traces of my old complaint."

To Rainsford's questioning glance the general said: "Ennui.<sup>21</sup> Boredom."

Then, taking a second helping of *Crêpes Suzette*, the general explained:

"The hunting was not good last night. The fellow lost his head. He made a straight trail that offered no problems at all. That's the trouble with these sailors; they have dull brains to begin with, and they do not know how to get about in the woods. They do excessively stupid and obvious things. It's most annoying. Will you have another glass of *Chablis*,<sup>22</sup> Mr. Rainsford?"

"General," said Rainsford firmly, "I wish to leave this island at once."

The general raised his thickets of eyebrows; he seemed hurt. "But, my dear fellow," the general protested, "you've only just come. You've had no hunting—"

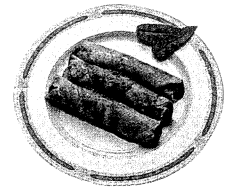
"I wish to go today," said Rainsford. He saw the dead black eyes of the general on him, studying him. General Zaroff's face suddenly brightened.

He filled Rainsford's glass with venerable *Chablis* from a dusty bottle.

"Tonight," said the general, "we will hunt—you and I."

Rainsford shook his head. "No, general," he said, "I will not hunt."

The general shrugged his shoulders and delicately ate a hothouse grape. "As you wish, my friend," he said. "The choice rests entirely with you. But may I not venture to suggest that you will find my idea of sport more diverting<sup>23</sup> than Ivan's?"



#### Visual Vocabulary

##### *Crêpes Suzette*

(kräps' sōō zet')

are thin pancakes rolled and heated in a sweet sauce flavored with orange or lemon juice and brandy.

22. *Chablis* (sha blē') is a white wine.

23. *Diverting* means "entertaining" or "amusing."

Make and Verify Predictions About Plot *What effect will a poor hunt have on the general?*

21. *Ennui* (än wē')

He nodded toward the corner to where the giant stood, scowling, his thick arms crossed on his hogshead of a chest.

"You don't mean—" cried Rainsford.

"My dear fellow," said the general, "have I not told you I always mean what I say about hunting? This is really an inspiration. I drink to a foeman worthy of my steel—at last." The general raised his glass, but Rainsford sat staring at him.

"You'll find this game worth playing," the general said enthusiastically. "Your brain against mine. Your woodcraft against mine. Your strength and stamina against mine. Outdoor chess! And the stake is not without value, eh?"

"And if I win—" began Rainsford huskily.

"I'll cheerfully acknowledge myself defeated if I do not find you by midnight of the third day," said General Zaroff. "My sloop will place you on the mainland near a town." The general read what Rainsford was thinking.

"Oh, you can trust me," said the Cossack. "I will give you my word as a gentleman and a sportsman. Of course you, in turn, must agree to say nothing of your visit here."

"I'll agree to nothing of the kind," said Rainsford.

"Oh," said the general, "in that case— But why discuss that now? Three days hence we can discuss it over a bottle of *Veuve Cliquot*,<sup>24</sup> unless—"

The general sipped his wine. Then a businesslike air animated him. "Ivan," he said to Rainsford, "will supply you with hunting clothes, food, a knife. I suggest you

wear moccasins; they leave a poorer trail. I suggest, too, that you avoid the big swamp in the southeast corner of the island. We call it Death Swamp. There's quicksand there. One foolish fellow tried it. The deplorable<sup>25</sup> part of it was that Lazarus followed him. You can imagine my feelings, Mr. Rainsford. I loved Lazarus; he was the finest hound in my pack. Well, I must beg you to excuse me now. I always take a siesta after lunch. You'll hardly have time for a nap, I fear. You'll want to start, no doubt. I shall not follow till dusk. Hunting at night is so much more exciting than by day, don't you think? *Au revoir*,<sup>26</sup> Mr. Rainsford, *au revoir*." General Zaroff, with a deep, courtly bow, strolled from the room.

Rainsford had fought his way through the bush for two hours. "I must keep my nerve. I must keep my nerve," he said through tight teeth.

He had not been entirely clear-headed when the chateau gates snapped shut behind him. His whole idea at first was to put distance between himself and General Zaroff, and, to this end, he had plunged along, spurred on by the sharp rowels<sup>27</sup> of something very like panic. Now he had got a grip on himself, had stopped, and was taking stock of himself and the situation. He saw that straight flight was futile; inevitably it would bring him face to face with the sea. He was in a picture with a frame of water, and his operations, clearly, must take place within that frame.

"I'll give him a trail to follow," muttered Rainsford, and he struck off from the rude path he had been following into the track-

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24. *Veuve Cliquot* (vœv klē kō') is a French champagne.

Make and Verify Predictions About Plot *What do you predict Rainsford will do?*

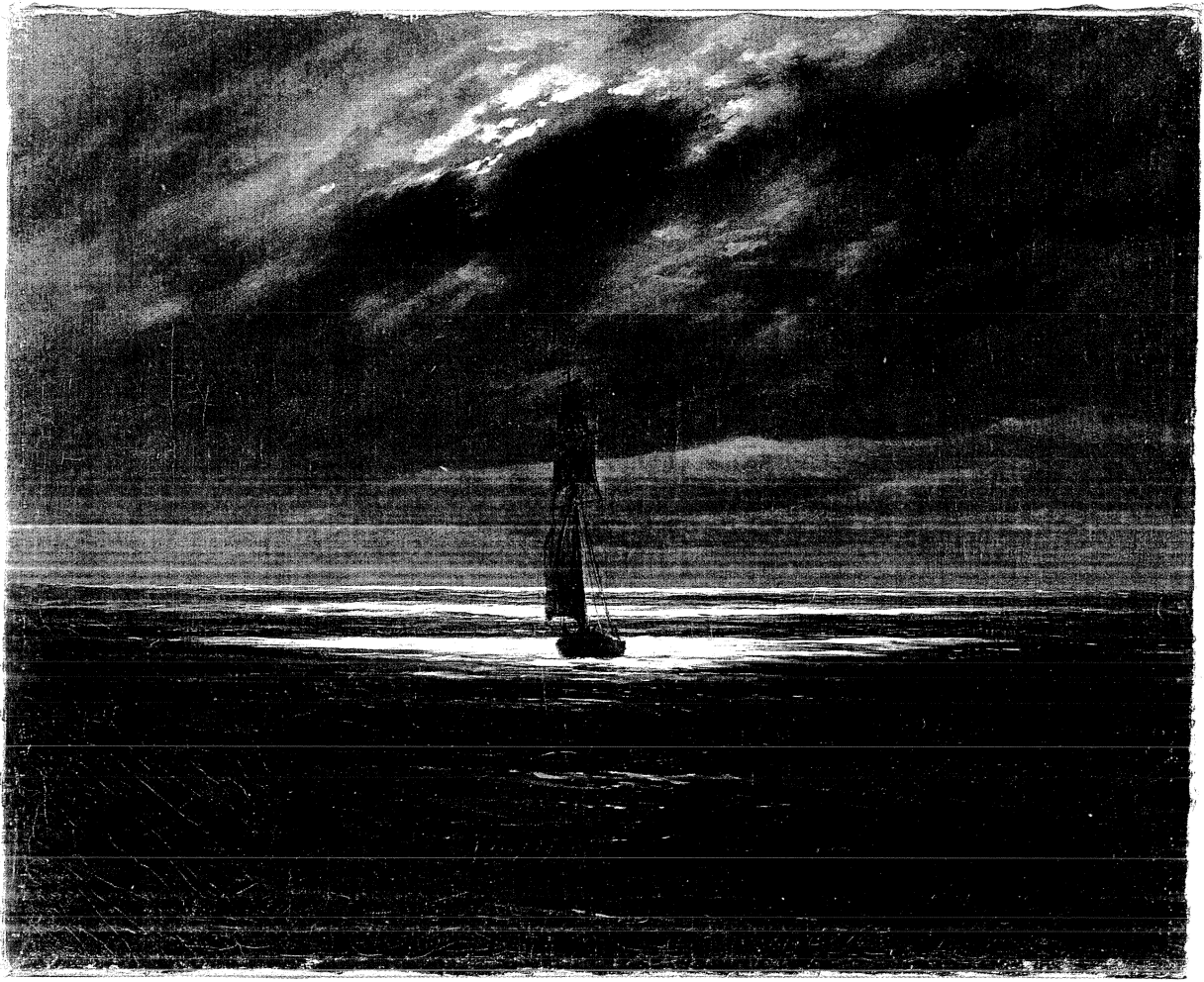
Matters of Life and Death *Why might Rainsford's statement put him in danger?*

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25. *Deplorable* means "very bad" or "regrettable."

26. *Au revoir* (ō rə vvär') is French for "good-bye" or "until we meet again."

27. *Rowel* is a wheel with sharp radiating points, as on the end of a rider's spur.



*Sea Piece by Moonlight*. Caspar David Friedrich. Oil on canvas, 25 x 33 cm. Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig, Germany.

less wilderness. He executed a series of intricate loops; he doubled on his trail again and again, recalling all the lore of the fox hunt, and all the dodges of the fox. Night found him leg-weary, with hands and face lashed by the branches, on a thickly wooded ridge. He knew it would be insane to blunder on through the dark, even if he had the strength. His need for rest was **imperative** and he thought: "I have played the fox, now I must play the

cat of the fable." A big tree with a thick trunk and outspread branches was near by, and, taking care to leave not the slightest mark, he climbed up into the crotch, and stretching out on one of the broad limbs, after a fashion, rested. Rest brought him new confidence and almost a feeling of security. Even so **zealous** a hunter as General Zaroff could not trace him there, he told himself; only the devil himself could follow that complicated trail through

#### Vocabulary

**imperative** (im per' ə tiv) *adj.* absolutely necessary

#### Vocabulary

**zealous** (zel' əs) *adj.* very eager; enthusiastic

the jungle after dark. But, perhaps the general was a devil—

An apprehensive night crawled slowly by like a wounded snake, and sleep did not visit Rainsford, although the silence of a dead world was on the jungle. Toward morning when a dingy gray was varnishing the sky, the cry of some startled bird focused Rainsford's attention in that direction. Something was coming through the bush, coming slowly, carefully, coming by the same winding way Rainsford had come. He flattened himself down on the limb, and through a screen of leaves almost as thick as tapestry, he watched. . . . That which was approaching was a man.

He was General Zaroff. He made his way along with his eyes fixed in utmost concentration on the ground before him. He paused, almost beneath the tree, dropped to his knees and studied the ground. Rainsford's impulse was to hurl himself down like a panther, but he saw that the general's right hand held something metallic—a small automatic pistol.

The hunter shook his head several times, as if he were puzzled. Then he straightened up and took from his case one of his black cigarettes; its pungent incenselike smoke floated up to Rainsford's nostrils.

Rainsford held his breath. The general's eyes had left the ground and were traveling inch by inch up the tree. Rainsford froze there, every muscle tensed for a spring. But the sharp eyes of the hunter stopped before they reached the limb where Rainsford lay; a smile spread over his brown face. Very deliberately he blew a smoke ring into the air; then he turned his back on the tree and walked carelessly away, back along the trail he had come.

The swish of the underbrush against his hunting boots grew fainter and fainter.

The pent-up air burst hotly from Rainsford's lungs. His first thought made him feel sick and numb. The general could follow a trail through the woods at night; he could follow an extremely difficult trail; he must have uncanny powers; only by the merest chance had the Cossack failed to see his quarry.

Rainsford's second thought was even more terrible. It sent a shudder of cold horror through his whole being. Why had the general smiled? Why had he turned back?

Rainsford did not want to believe what his reason told him was true, but the truth was as evident as the sun that had by now pushed through the morning mists. The general was playing with him! The general was saving him for another day's sport! The Cossack was the cat; he was the mouse. Then it was that Rainsford knew the full meaning of terror.

"I will not lose my nerve. I will not."

He slid down from the tree, and struck off again into the woods. His face was set and he forced the machinery of his mind to function. Three hundred yards from his hiding place he stopped where a huge dead tree leaned precariously on a smaller, living one. Throwing off his sack of food, Rainsford took his knife from its sheath and began to work with all his energy.

The job was finished at last, and he threw himself down behind a fallen log a hundred feet away. He did not have to wait long. The cat was coming again to play with the mouse.

Following the trail with the sureness of a bloodhound came General Zaroff. Nothing escaped those searching black

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Suspense *What words and images does the author use in this passage to heighten the suspense?*

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Matters of Life and Death *How are Zaroff and Rainsford like a cat and mouse?*



eyes, no crushed blade of grass, no bent twig, no mark, no matter how faint, in the moss. So intent was the Cossack on his stalking that he was upon the thing Rainsford had made before he saw it. His foot touched it, the general sensed his danger and leaped back with the agility of an ape. But he was not quick enough; the dead tree, delicately adjusted to rest on the cut living one, crashed down and struck the general a glancing blow on the shoulder as it fell; but for his alertness, he must have been smashed beneath it. He staggered, but he did not fall; nor did he drop his revolver. He stood there, rubbing his injured shoulder, and Rainsford, with fear again gripping his heart, heard the general's mocking laugh ring through the jungle.

"Rainsford," called the general, "if you are within sound of my voice, as I suppose you are, let me congratulate you. Not many men know how to make a Malay man-catcher. Luckily, for me, I, too, have hunted in Malacca.<sup>28</sup> You are proving interesting, Mr. Rainsford. I am going now to have my wound dressed; it's only a slight one. But I shall be back."

When the general, nursing his bruised shoulder, had gone, Rainsford took up his flight again. It was flight now, a desperate, hopeless flight, that carried him on for some hours. Dusk came, then darkness, and still he pressed on. The ground grew softer under his moccasins, the vegetation grew ranker, denser; insects bit him savagely. Then, as he stepped forward, his foot sank into the ooze. He tried to wrench it back, but the muck sucked viciously at his foot as if it were a giant leech. With a violent effort,

he tore his feet loose. He knew where he was now. Death Swamp and its quicksand.

His hands were tight closed as if his nerve were something tangible that someone in the darkness was trying to tear from his grip. The softness of the earth had given him an idea. He stepped back from the quicksand a dozen feet or so and, like some huge prehistoric beaver, he began to dig.

Rainsford had dug himself in in France when a second's delay meant death. That had been a placid pastime compared to his digging now. The pit grew deeper; when it was above his shoulders, he climbed out and from some hard saplings cut stakes and sharpened them to a fine point. These stakes he planted in the bottom of the pit



Visual Vocabulary  
A sapling is a young tree.

with the points sticking up. With flying fingers he wove a rough carpet of weeds and branches and with it he covered the mouth of the pit. Then, wet with sweat and aching with tiredness, he crouched behind the stump of a lightning-charred tree.

He knew that his pursuer was coming; he heard the padding sound of feet on the soft earth, and the night breeze brought him the perfume of the general's cigarette. It seemed to Rainsford that the general was coming with unusual swiftness; he was not feeling his way along, foot by foot. Rainsford, crouching there, could not see the general, nor could he see the pit. He lived a year in a minute. Then he felt an impulse to cry aloud with joy, for he heard the sharp crackle of the breaking branches as the cover of the pit gave way; he heard the sharp scream of pain as the pointed stakes

28. The *Malay* are a people of southeast Asia, and *Malacca* (mə lak' ə) is their home region.

Make and Verify Predictions About Plot How do you think Zaroff will act after he returns? Why?

Suspense Why does this detail heighten the suspense?

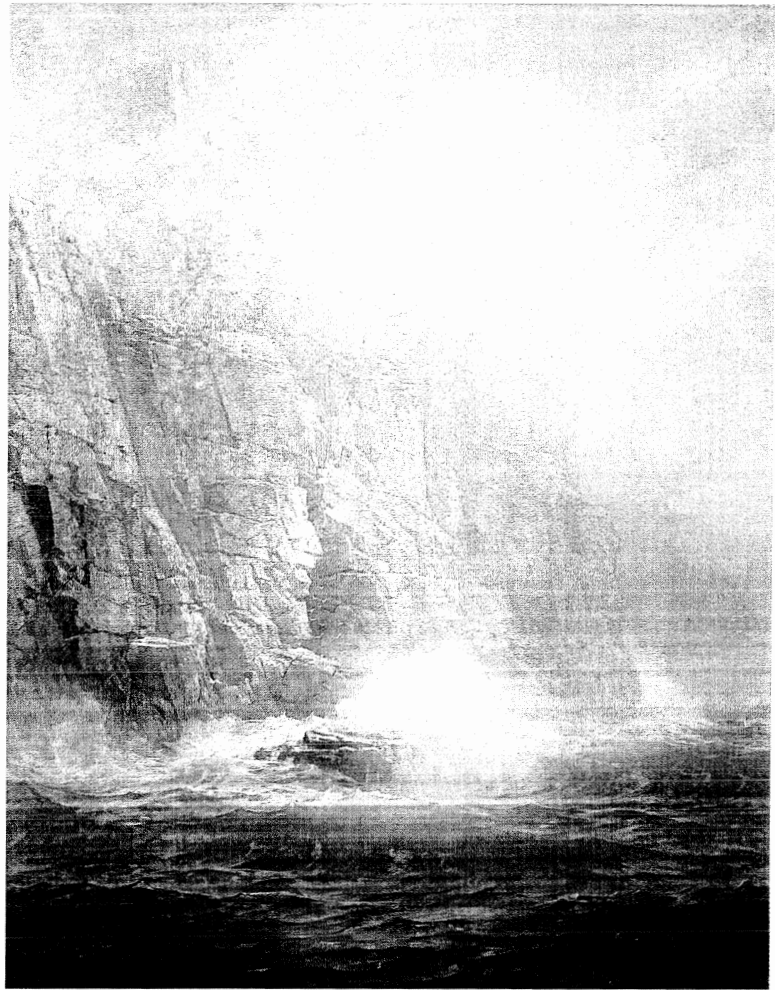
found their mark. He leaped up from his place of concealment. Then he cowered back. Three feet from the pit a man was standing, with an electric torch in his hand.

"You've done well, Rainsford," the voice of the general called. "Your Burmese tiger pit has claimed one of my best dogs. Again you score. I think, Mr. Rainsford, I'll see what you can do against my whole pack. I'm going home for a rest now. Thank you for a most amusing evening."

At daybreak Rainsford, lying near the swamp, was awakened by a sound that made him know that he had new things to learn about fear. It was a distant sound, faint and wavering, but he knew it. It was the baying of a pack of hounds.

Rainsford knew he could do one of two things. He could stay where he was and wait. That was suicide. He could flee. That was postponing the inevitable. For a moment he stood there, thinking. An idea that held a wild chance came to him, and, tightening his belt, he headed away from the swamp.

The baying of the hounds drew nearer, then still nearer, nearer, ever nearer. On a ridge Rainsford climbed a tree. Down a watercourse, not a quarter of a mile away, he could see the bush moving. Straining his eyes, he saw the lean figure of General Zaroff; just ahead of him Rainsford made out another figure whose wide shoulders



*Land's End—Cornwall*, 1888. William Trost Richards. Oil on canvas, 62 x 50 in. The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, OH.

View the Art What might it feel like to stand at the edge of cliffs like these?

surged through the tall jungle weeds; it was the giant Ivan, and he seemed pulled forward by some unseen force; Rainsford knew that Ivan must be holding the pack in leash.

They would be on him any minute now. His mind worked frantically. He thought of a native trick he had learned in Uganda. He slid down the tree. He caught hold of a springy young sapling and to it he fastened his hunting knife, with the blade pointing down the trail; with a bit of wild grapevine he tied back the sapling. Then he ran for his life. The hounds raised their voices as

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*Suspense* How do the short sentences add to the feeling of suspense?



they hit the fresh scent. Rainsford knew now how an animal at bay<sup>29</sup> feels.

He had to stop to get his breath. The baying of the hounds stopped abruptly, and Rainsford's heart stopped, too. They must have reached the knife.

He shinned excitedly up a tree and looked back. His pursuers had stopped. But the hope that was in Rainsford's brain when he climbed died, for he saw in the shallow valley that General Zaroff was still on his feet. But Ivan was not. The knife, driven by the recoil of the springing tree, had not wholly failed.

Rainsford had hardly tumbled to the ground when the pack took up the cry again.

"Nerve, nerve, nerve!" he panted, as he dashed along. A blue gap showed between the trees dead ahead. Ever nearer drew the hounds. Rainsford forced himself on toward that gap. He reached it. It was the shore of the sea. Across a cove he could see the gloomy gray stone of the chateau. Twenty feet below him the sea rumbled and hissed. Rainsford hesitated. He heard the hounds. Then he leaped far out into the sea. . . .

When the general and his pack reached the place by the sea, the Cossack stopped. For some minutes he stood regarding the blue-green expanse of water. He shrugged his shoulders. Then he sat down, took a drink of brandy from a silver flask, lit a cigarette, and hummed a bit from "*Madame Butterfly*."<sup>30</sup>

29. At bay refers to the position of a cornered animal that is forced to turn and confront its pursuers.

30. *Madame Butterfly* is an Italian opera by Giacomo Puccini.

Make and Verify Predictions About Plot What do you think will happen to Rainsford as a result of this jump?

"Better luck  
another time."

General Zaroff had an exceedingly good dinner in his great paneled dining hall that evening. With it he had a bottle of *Pol Roger* and half a bottle of *Chambertin*. Two slight annoyances kept him from perfect enjoyment. One was the thought that it would be difficult to replace Ivan; the other was that his quarry had escaped him; of course the American hadn't played the game—so thought the general as he tasted his after-dinner liqueur. In his library he read. At ten he went up to his bedroom. He was deliciously tired, he said to himself, as he locked himself in. There was a little moonlight, so, before turning on his light, he went to the window and looked down at the courtyard. He could see the great hounds, and he called: "Better luck another time," to them. Then he switched on the light.

A man, who had been hiding in the curtains of the bed, was standing there.

"Rainsford!" screamed the general. "How in God's name did you get here?"

"Swam," said Rainsford. "I found it quicker than walking through the jungle."

The general sucked in his breath and smiled. "I congratulate you," he said. "You have won the game."


Rainsford did not smile. "I am still a beast at bay," he said in a low, hoarse voice. "Get ready, General Zaroff."

The general made one of his deepest bows. "I see," he said. "Splendid! One of us is to furnish a repast<sup>31</sup> for the hounds. The other will sleep in this very excellent bed. On guard, Rainsford. . . ."

He had never slept in a better bed, Rainsford decided. ☞

31. Repast means "meal" or "feast."

Matters of Life and Death What does the phrase "a beast at bay" suggest about Rainsford?



# The Cask of Amontillado

Edgar Allan Poe

**T**he thousand injuries of Fortunato<sup>1</sup> I had borne as I best could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat. *At length* I would be avenged; this was a point definitively settled—but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved, **precluded** the idea of risk. I must not only punish, but

punish with **impunity**. A wrong is undressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally undressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.<sup>2</sup>

It must be understood, that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause

1. *Fortunato* (fōr' tōō nă' tō)

#### Vocabulary

**preclude** (pri klōōd') *v.* to prevent; to make impossible

#### Vocabulary

**impunity** (im pū' nă tē) *n.* freedom from punishment, harm, or bad consequences



to doubt my good-will. I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile *now* was at the thought of his immolation.<sup>3</sup>

He had a weak point—this Fortunato—although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided himself on his connoisseurship<sup>4</sup> in wine. Few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part their enthusiasm is adopted to suit the time and opportunity—to practice imposture upon the British and Austrian *millionnaires*. In painting and gemmary Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack—but in the matter of old wines he was sincere. In this respect I did not differ from him materially: I was skillful in the Italian vintages myself, and bought largely whenever I could.

It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend. He **accosted** me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much. The man wore motley.<sup>5</sup> He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells. I was so pleased to see him, that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand.

3. Here, *immolation* means "death or destruction."

4. *Connoisseurship* (kon' ə sur' ship) is expert knowledge that qualifies one to pass judgment in a particular area.

5. *Motley* is the multicolored costume of a court jester or clown.

**Matters of Life and Death** *What is the narrator's attitude toward the destruction of Fortunato?*

#### **Glossary**

**accost** (ə kōst') *v.* to approach and speak to, especially in an aggressive manner

I said to him: "My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met. How remarkably well you are looking today! But I have received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado,<sup>6</sup> and I have my doubts."

"How?" said he. "Amontillado? A pipe? Impossible! And in the middle of the carnival!"

"I have my doubts," I replied; "and I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain."

"Amontillado!"

"I have my doubts."

"Amontillado!"

"And I must satisfy them."

"Amontillado!"

"As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchesi.<sup>7</sup> If anyone has a critical turn, it is he. He

will tell me——"

"Luchesi cannot tell Amontillado from Sherry."

"And yet some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own."

"Come, let us go."

"Whither?"

"To your vaults."

"My friend, no; I will not impose upon your good nature. I perceive you have an engagement. Luchesi——"

"I have no engagement;—come."

"My friend, no. It is not the engagement, but the severe cold with which I perceive

6. A *pipe* is a wine barrel that holds 126 gallons. *Amontillado* (ə mōn tē yā' dō) is a kind of pale, dry sherry from Spain.

7. *Luchesi* (lōō kā' sē)

**Mood** *How would you characterize this opening exchange between the two main characters?*

*Carnival in Rome, 1839. Aleksandr Petrovich Myasoedov. Oil on canvas. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.*

**View the Art** This painting depicts a street scene during Carnival. How would you describe the atmosphere in this painting? How does it compare with the opening scene from this story?

you are afflicted. The vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with niter.”<sup>8</sup>

“Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado! You have been imposed upon. And as for Luchesi, he cannot distinguish Sherry from Amontillado.”

Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm. Putting on a mask of black silk, and drawing a *roquelaure* closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo.<sup>9</sup>

There were no attendants at home; they had absconded to make merry in honor of the time. I had told them that I should not return until the morning, and had given them **explicit** orders not to stir from the house. These orders were sufficient, I well knew, to insure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned.

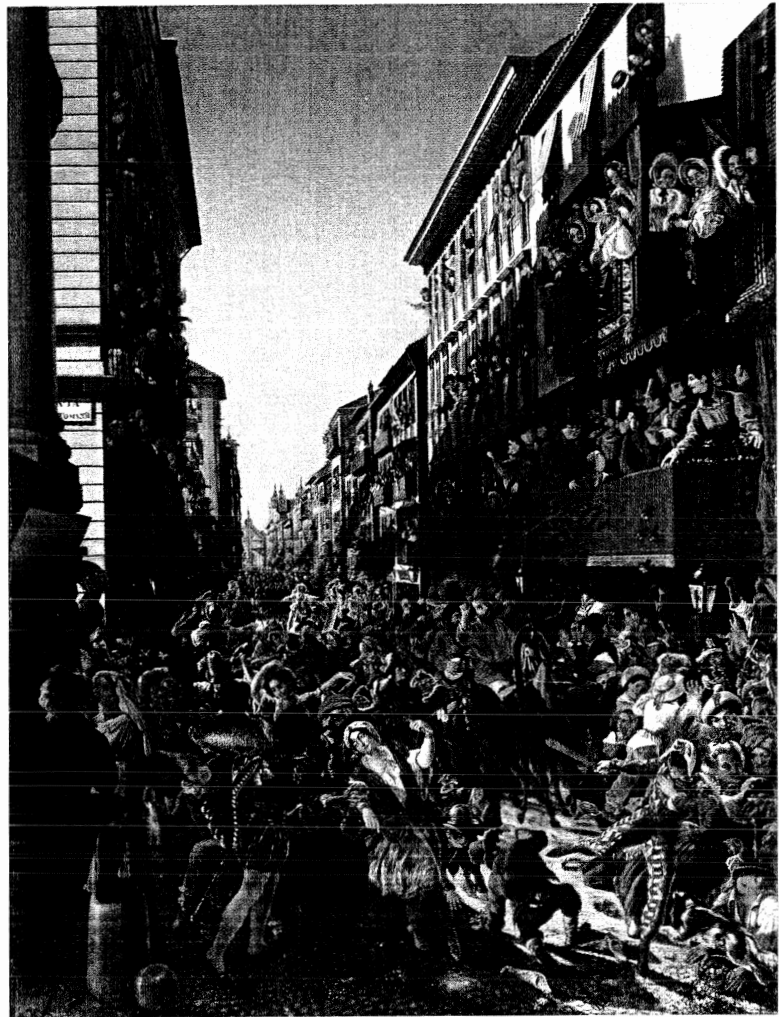
8. *Niter* is a salt-like substance found in cool, damp places.

9. A *roquelaure* (rôk ə lor') is a knee-length cloak that was popular in the 1700s. A *palazzo* (pə lät'sô) is a mansion or palace.

Paraphrase Restate this sentence in your own words.

#### Vocabulary

**explicit** (eks plis' it) *adj.* definitely stated; clearly expressed



I took from their sconces two flambeaux,<sup>10</sup> and giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he followed. We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together on the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors.

The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode.

“The pipe?” said he.

“It is farther on,” said I; “but observe the white web-work which gleams from these cavern walls.”

10. *Sconces* are wall brackets that hold candles or torches, and *flambeaux* (flam' bô') are lighted torches.

He turned toward me, and looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication.<sup>11</sup>

"Niter?" he asked, at length.

"Niter," I replied. "How long have you had that cough?"

"Ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!"

My poor friend found it impossible to reply for many minutes.

"It is nothing," he said, at last.

"Come," I said, with decision, "we will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchesi——"

"Enough," he said; "the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough."

"True—true," I replied; "and, indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily; but you should use all proper caution. A draft of this Medoc<sup>12</sup> will defend us from the damp."

Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle which I drew from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mold.

"Drink," I said, presenting him the wine.

He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me familiarly, while his bells jingled.

"I drink," he said, "to the buried that repose<sup>13</sup> around us."

"And I to your long life."

He again took my arm, and we proceeded.

"These vaults," he said, "are extensive."

"The Montresors," I replied, "were a great and numerous family."

"I forget your arms."

"A huge human foot d'or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant<sup>14</sup> whose fangs are imbedded in the heel."

"And the motto?"

"*Nemo me impune lacessit.*"<sup>15</sup>

"Good!" he said.

The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc. We had passed through walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons<sup>16</sup> intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above the elbow.

"The niter!" I said; "see, it increases. It hangs like moss upon the vaults. We are below the river's bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones. Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough——"

"It is nothing," he said; "let us go on. But first, another draft of the Medoc."

I broke and reached him a flagon<sup>17</sup> of De Grâve. He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light. He laughed



**Visual Vocabulary**  
*Arms* is short for "coat of arms," an arrangement of figures and symbols on or around a shield that, along with a motto, represents one's ancestry.

11. [*filmy orbs . . . intoxication*] This phrase describes Fortunato's eyes as clouded and watery from excessive drinking.

12. *Medoc* (mā dôk') is a French red wine. A *draft* is the amount taken in one swig or swallow.

13. To *repose* is to lie at rest, either sleeping or in death.

14. The Montresor family's coat of arms includes a golden foot on a sky-blue background and a snake rising up.

15. The *motto* is Latin for "Nobody provokes me with impunity."

16. *Casks* and *puncheons* are large containers for storing liquids.

17. The *flagon* is a narrow-necked bottle with a handle.

**Mood** What words in this passage suggest danger?

**Matters of Life and Death** How do these details add to the growing sense of entrapment in the story?



and threw the bottle upward with a gesticulation I did not understand.

I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement—a grotesque one.

"You do not comprehend?" he said.

"Not I," I replied.

"Then you are not of the brotherhood."

"How?"

"You are not of the masons."<sup>18</sup>

"Yes, yes," I said; "yes, yes."

"You? Impossible! A mason?"

"A mason," I replied.

"A sign," he said.

"It is this," I answered, producing a trowel from beneath the folds of my *roquelaure*.

"You jest," he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces. "But let us proceed to the Amontillado."

"Be it so," I said, replacing the tool beneath the cloak, and again offering him my arm. He leaned upon it heavily.

We continued our route in search of the Amontillado. We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt,<sup>19</sup> in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.

At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size. Within the wall thus exposed by the displacing of the bones, we perceived a still interior recess, in depth about four feet, in width three, in height six or seven. It seemed to have been constructed for no especial use within itself, but formed merely

18. Here, *masons* is short for "Freemasons," an organization of stonemasons and bricklayers that was formed in the Middle Ages. By the time of this story, the masons had become a social group with secret rituals and signs.

19. A *crypt* is a burial chamber.

*Mood* What emotion does the description in this paragraph create?

the interval between two of the colossal supports of the roof of the catacombs, and was backed by one of their circumscribing walls of solid granite.

It was in vain that Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavored to pry<sup>20</sup> into the depth of the recess. Its termination the feeble light did not enable us to see.

"Proceed," I said;  
"herein is the Amontillado. As for Luchesi——"

"He is an ignoramus," interrupted my friend, as he stepped unsteadily forward, while I followed immediately at his heels. In an instant he had reached the extremity of the niche,<sup>21</sup> and finding his progress arrested by the rock, stood stupidly bewildered. A moment more and I had fettered<sup>22</sup> him to the granite. In its surface were two iron staples, distant from each other about two feet, horizontally. From one of these depended a short chain, from the other a padlock. Throwing the links about his waist, it was but the work of a few seconds to secure it. He was too much astounded to resist. Withdrawing the key I stepped back from the recess.

"Pass your hand," I said, "over the wall; you cannot help feeling the niter. Indeed it is *very damp*. Once more let me **implore** you to return. No? Then I must positively

leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my power."

"The Amontillado!" ejaculated my friend, not yet recovered from his astonishment.

"True," I replied; "the Amontillado."

As I said these words I busied myself among the pile of bones of which I have before spoken. Throwing them aside, I

soon uncovered a quantity of building stone and mortar. With these materials and with the aid of my trowel, I began vigorously to wall up the entrance of the niche.

I had scarcely laid the first tier of the masonry when I discovered that the intoxication of Fortunato had in a great measure worn off. The earliest indication I had of this was a low moaning cry from the depth of the recess. It was *not* the cry of a drunken man. There was then a long and obstinate silence. I laid the second tier, and the third, and the fourth; and then I heard the furious vibrations of the chain. The noise lasted for several minutes, during which, that I might hearken to it with the more satisfaction, I ceased my labors and sat down upon the bones. When at last the clanking subsided, I resumed the trowel, and finished without interruption the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh tier. The wall was now nearly upon a level with my breast. I again paused, and holding the flambeaux over the mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within.

A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently

"Indeed it is  
*very damp.*"

20. Here, *pry* means "to look closely; peer."

21. Here, the *extremity of the niche* (nich) is the farthest spot inside the recess.

22. *Fettered* means "bound with chains or shackles; restrained."

Paraphrase Restate these sentences in your own words.

#### Vocabulary

**implore** (im plôr') v. to ask earnestly; to beg

Matters of Life and Death What does Fortunato finally realize?



**Visual Vocabulary**  
A *rapier* (rā' pē ər) is a long, light-weight sword with a sharp point but no cutting edge.

back. For a brief moment I hesitated—I trembled. Unsheathing my rapier, I began to grope with it about the recess; but the thought of an instant reassured me. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs, and felt satisfied. I reapproached the wall. I replied to the yells of him who clamored. I re-echoed—I aided—

I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamor grew still.

It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close. I had completed the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth tier. I had finished a portion of the last and the eleventh; there remained but a single stone to be fitted and plastered in. I struggled with its weight; I placed it partially in its destined<sup>23</sup> position. But now there came from out the niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognizing as that of the noble Fortunato. The voice said—

**“For the love of God, Montresor!”**

“Ha! ha! ha!—he! he!—a very good joke indeed—an excellent jest. We will have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo—he! he! he!—over our wine—he! he! he!”

“The Amontillado!” I said.

“He! he! he!—he! he! he!—yes, the Amontillado. But is it not getting late? Will not they be awaiting us at the palazzo, the Lady Fortunato and the rest? Let us be gone.”

“Yes,” I said, “let us be gone.”

“For the love of God, Montresor!”

“Yes,” I said, “for the love of God!”

But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud:

“Fortunato!”

No answer. I called again:

“Fortunato!”

No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall

within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick—on account of the dampness of the catacombs. I hastened to make an end of my labor. I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against

the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart<sup>24</sup> of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. *In pace requiescat!*<sup>25</sup> ☞

23. Here, *destined* means “intended for a particular purpose or use.”

**Paraphrase** Restate these lines, and then explain why Montresor is doing what he is doing.

24. A *rampart* is a protective barrier or fortification.

25. *In pace requiescat* (in pā 'chā rek 'wē es kät ') is Latin for “May he rest in peace.”

# After Twenty Years

*Both Bob and Jim were on hand to keep their date made such a long time before—but a lot can happen in twenty years.*

The policeman on the beat moved up the avenue slowly. The time was barely 10 o'clock at night, but chilly gusts of wind with a taste of rain in them had well nigh emptied the streets.

Trying doors as he went, twirling his club with many intricate and artful movements, turning now and then to cast his watchful eye down the street, the officer, with his stalwart form and slight swagger, made a fine picture of a guardian of the peace. The vicinity was one that kept early hours. Now and then you might see the lights of a cigar store or of an all-night lunch counter; but the majority of the doors belonged to business places that had long since been closed.

When about midway of a certain block, the policeman suddenly slowed his walk. In the doorway of a darkened hardware store a man leaned, with an unlighted cigar in his mouth. As the policeman walked up to him the man spoke up quickly.

"It's all right, officer," he said calmly. "I'm just waiting for a friend. It's an appointment made twenty years ago. Sounds a little funny to you, doesn't it? Well, I'll explain if you'd like to make certain it's all straight. About that long

## After Twenty Years

ago there used to be a restaurant where this store stands—'Big Joe' Brady's restaurant."

"Until five years ago," said the policeman. "It was torn down then."

The man in the doorway struck a match and lit his cigar. The light showed a pale, square-jawed face with keen eyes, and a little white scar near his right eyebrow. His scarfpin was a large diamond, oddly set.

"Twenty years ago tonight," said the man, "I dined here at 'Big Joe' Brady's with Jimmy Wells, my best chum, and the finest chap in the world. He and I were raised here in New York, just like two brothers, together. I was eighteen and Jimmy was twenty. The next morning I was to start for the West to make my fortune. You couldn't have dragged Jimmy out of New York. He thought it was the only place on earth. Well, we agreed that night that we would meet here again exactly twenty years from that date and time, no matter what our conditions might be or from what distance we might have to come. We figured that in twenty years each of us ought to have our destiny worked out and our fortunes made, whatever they were going to be."

"It sounds pretty interesting," said the policeman. "Rather a long time between meets, though, it seems to me. Haven't you heard from your friend since you left?"

"Well, yes, for a time we corresponded," said the other. "But after a year or two we lost track of each other. You see, the West is a pretty big proposition, and I kept hustling around over it pretty lively. But I know Jimmy will meet me here if he's alive, for he always was the truest, staunchest old chap in the world. He'll never forget. I came a thousand miles to stand in this door tonight, and it's worth it if my old partner turns up."

The waiting man pulled out a handsome watch, the lids of it set with small diamonds.

"Three minutes to ten," he announced. "It was exactly ten o'clock when we parted here at the restaurant door."



"Did pretty well out West, didn't you?" asked the policeman.

"You bet! I hope Jimmy has done half as well. He was a kind of a plodder, though, good fellow as he was. I've had to compete with some of the sharpest wits going to get my pile. A man gets in a groove in New York. It takes the West to put a razor-edge on him."

The policeman twirled his club and took a step or two.

"I'll be on my way. Hope your friend comes around all right. Going to call time on him sharp?"

"I should say not!" said the other. "I'll give him half an hour at least. If Jimmy is alive on earth he'll be here by that time. So long, officer."

"Good-night, sir," said the policeman, passing on along his beat, trying doors as he went.

There was now a fine, cold drizzle falling, and the wind had risen from its uncertain puffs into a steady blow. The few foot passengers astir in that quarter hurried dismally and silently along with coat collars turned high and pocketed hands. And in the door of the hardware store the man who had come a thousand miles to fill an appointment with the friend of his youth, smoked his cigar and waited.

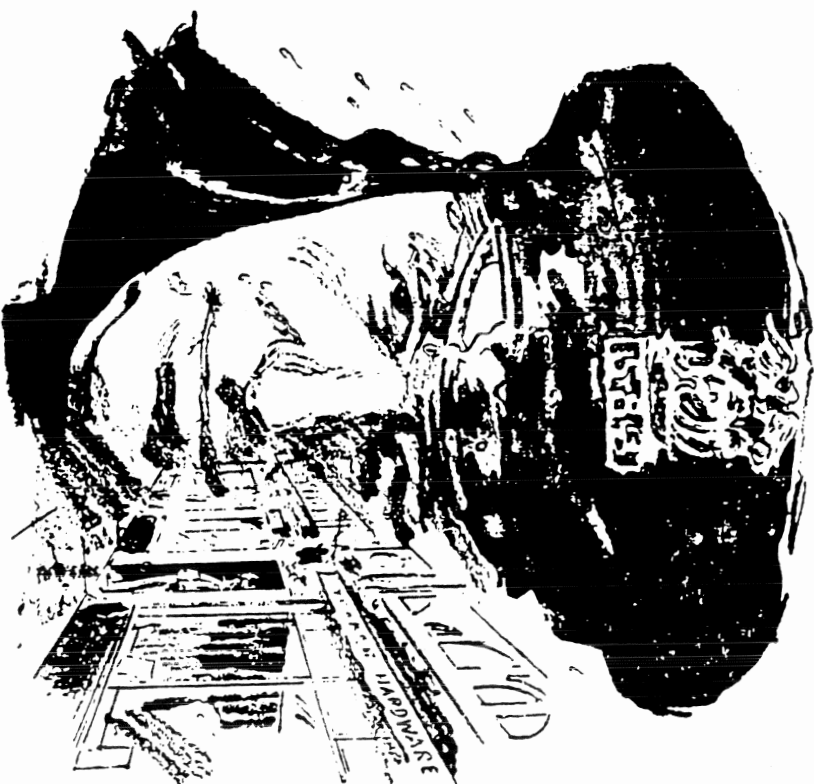
About twenty minutes he waited, and then a tall man in a long overcoat, with collar turned up to his ears, hurried across from the opposite side of the street. He went directly to the waiting man.

"Is that you, Bob?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Is that you, Jimmy Wells?" cried the man in the door.

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed the new arrival, grasping both the other's hands with his own. "It's Bob, sure as fate. I was certain I'd find you here if you were still in existence. Well, well, well!—twenty years is a long time. The old restaurant's gone, Bob; I wish it had lasted, so we could have had another dinner there. How has the West treated you, old man?"

"Bully; it has given me everything I asked it for. You've



changed lots, Jimmy. I never thought you were so tall by two or three inches."

"Oh, I grew a bit after I was twenty."

"Doing well in New York, Jimmy?"

"Moderately. I have a position in one of the city departments. Come on, Bob; we'll go around to a place I know of, and have a good long talk about old times."

The two started up the street, arm in arm. The man from the West was beginning to outline the history of his career. The other listened with interest.

An O. Henry Reader

At the corner stood a drugstore, brilliant with electric lights. When they came into this glare each of them turned to gaze upon the other's face.

The man from the West stopped suddenly and released his arm.

"You're not Jimmy Wells," he snapped. "Twenty years is a long time, but not long enough to change a man's nose from a Roman to a pug."

"It sometimes changes a good man into a bad one," said the tall man. "You've been under arrest for ten minutes, 'Silky' Bob. Chicago thinks you may have dropped over our way and wires us it wants to have a chat with you. Going quietly, are you? That's sensible. Now, before we go to the station here's a note I was asked to hand to you. You may read it here at the window. It's from Patrolman Wells."

The man from the West unfolded the little piece of paper handed him. His hand was steady when he began to read, but it trembled a little by the time he had finished. The note was rather short.

Bob: I was at the appointed place on time. When you struck the match to light your cigar I saw it was the face of the man wanted in Chicago. Somehow I couldn't do it myself, so I went around and got a plain-clothes man to do the job.

JIMMY

# A Dip in the Poole

by Bill Pronzini



*I* was sitting in a large comfortable leather armchair in the lobby of the Hotel Poole, leafing through a magazine, when the young woman in the dark tweed suit picked Andrew J. Stuyvesant's pocket.

She did it very cleverly. Stuyvesant—a silver-haired old gentleman who carries a walking stick and is worth fifteen or twenty million dollars—had just stepped out of one of the elevators in front of me.

The young woman appeared from the direction of the marble staircase. Walking rapidly, and pretending to be absorbed in thought, she

bumped into him. She then appeared embarrassed and apologized. Stuyvesant bowed in a gallant way, saying, "That's perfectly all right."

I could see that she got his wallet and the diamond stickpin from his tie. Stuyvesant neither felt nor suspected a thing.

The young woman apologized again and then hurried off across the thick carpeting toward the main entrance at the end of the room. As she moved, she skillfully slipped the items into a tan suede bag she carried over one arm.

Immediately, I popped out of my chair and moved quickly after her. She managed to get within a few steps of the glass doors before I caught up with her.

I let my hand fall on her arm. "Excuse me just a moment," I said, smiling.

She stiffened, becoming completely still. Then she turned and regarded me icily. "I beg your pardon," she said in a frosty voice.

"You and I had best have a little chat."

"I am not in the habit of chatting with men I don't know."

"I think you'll make an exception in my case," I said.

Her brown eyes flashed angrily as she said. "I suggest you let go of my arm. If you don't, I shall call the manager."

I shrugged lightly. "There's no need for that."

"I certainly hope not."

"Simply because he would only call for me."

"What?"

"I'm the chief of security at the Hotel Poole, you see," I told her. "I'm what once was referred to as the house detective."

She grew pale, and the light dimmed in her eyes. "Oh," she said softly.

At my direction, we moved toward the hotel's lounge, a short distance on our left. She sat down in one of the leather booths and I seated myself opposite. A waiter approached, but I shook my head and he retreated.

I looked at the young woman on the other side of the table. The soft glow from the candle in its center gave her classic features the impression of purity and innocence.

"Without a doubt," I said, "you're the most beautiful dip I've ever encountered."

"I . . . don't know what you're talking about," she said.

"Don't you?"

"Certainly not."

"A *dip* is underworld slang for a pickpocket."

She pretended to be insulted. "Are you suggesting that I . . . ?"

"Oh, come now," I said. "There's no purpose to be served in continuing this act. I saw you lift Mr. Stuyvesant's wallet and his diamond stickpin. I was sitting directly across from the elevator, not fifteen feet away."

She didn't say anything. Her fingers drummed over her tan suede bag. After a moment, her eyes lifted to mine, briefly, and then dropped to the bag again. She sighed in a tortured way. "You're right, of course," she finally said. "I stole those things."

I reached out, gently took the bag from her and snapped it open. Stuyvesant's wallet and stickpin rested on top of the various articles inside. I removed them, reclosed the bag and returned it to her.

She said softly, "I'm not a thief. I want you to know that. Not really, I mean. I have

this *compulsion*—this uncontrollable urge—to steal. I'm powerless to stop myself."

"Kleptomania?"

"Yes. I've been to several doctors, but they've been unable to cure me so far."

I shook my head in sympathy. "It must be terrible for you."

"Terrible," she agreed. "When my father learns of this, he'll have me put away in a hospital. He threatened to do that if I ever stole anything again."

I said, "Your father doesn't have to know what happened here today. There was no real harm done, actually. Mr. Stuyvesant will get his wallet and stickpin back. And I see no reason for causing the hotel unnecessary embarrassment through the publicity that will result if I report the incident."

Her face brightened hopefully. "Then—you're going to let me go?"

I took a long breath. "I suppose I'm too soft-hearted for the type of job that I have. Yes, I'm going to let you go. But you must promise me that you'll never set foot inside of the Hotel Poole again. If I ever see you here, I'll have to report you to the police."

"You won't!" she assured me earnestly. "I have an appointment with another doctor tomorrow morning. I feel sure I can be helped."

I nodded, then turned to stare through

the lounge to where the guests were moving back and forth in the lobby. When I turned back again, the street door to the lounge was just closing and the young woman was gone.

I sat there for a short time, thinking about her. If she was a kleptomaniac, I decided, then I was the King of England. What she was, of course, was a professional pickpocket. I could tell that by her technique which was very skillful. She was also an extremely clever liar.

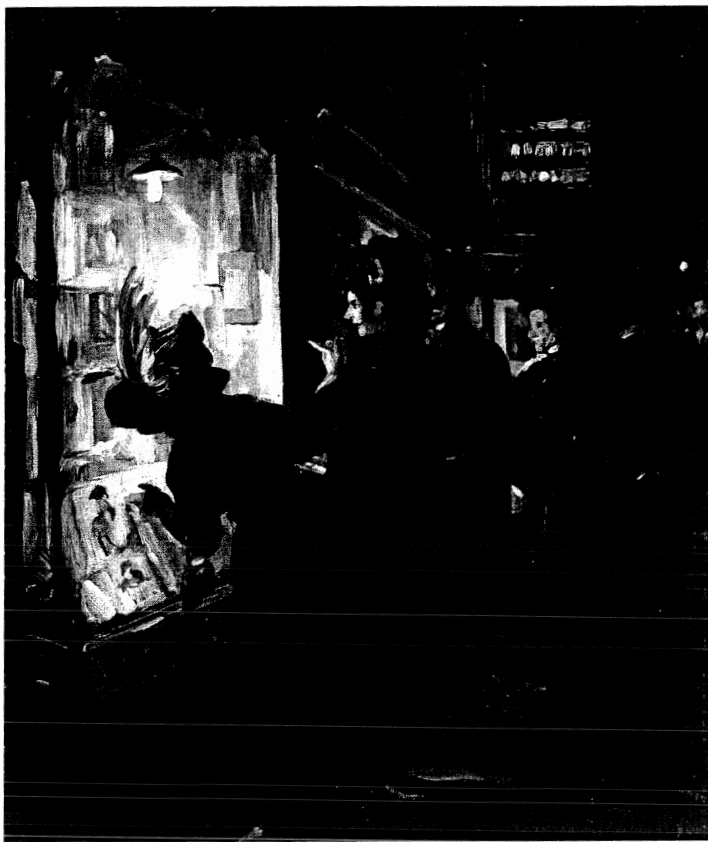
I smiled to myself and stood up and went out into the lobby again. But instead of resuming my position in the armchair, I made a sharp left and walked casually out of the hotel and on to Powell Street.

As I made my way through the afternoon crowds, my right hand rested lightly on the fat leather wallet and the diamond stickpin in my coat pocket. I found myself feeling a little sorry for the young woman. But just a little.

Because Andrew J. Stuyvesant had been my mark from the moment I first saw him entering the Hotel Poole that morning. I had waited three hours for him to come into the lobby. And I was just seconds away from bumping into him myself, when she came out of nowhere and grabbed his wallet and stickpin. So I figured I really had a right to them, after all.

### Thinking More About the Story

- A pun is usually defined as "a play on words." According to a character in the story, the word *dip* is slang for "pickpocket." Tell why the story is called "A Dip in the Poole." Explain the pun in the title.
- "Two Dips in the Poole" might also have been an appropriate title. Explain why. How might this title have given away the ending of the story?
- The young woman promised the man that she would never come back to the hotel. Why do you think he wanted to make certain that she would never return? Think of at least two good reasons.



*Picture Shop Window*, 1907. John Sloan. Oil on canvas, 32 x 25½ in. Gift of Mrs. Felix Fuld, 1925. The Newark Museum, NJ.

# The Gift of the Magi

O. Henry

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent **imputation** of **parsimony** that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates<sup>1</sup> the moral

reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad.<sup>2</sup>

In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining<sup>3</sup>

1. To *instigate* is to stir up or cause something to happen.

## Vocabulary

**imputation** (im' pyə tā' shən) n. an accusation  
**parsimony** (pär' sə mō' nē) n. stinginess

2. O. Henry is making a play on words here. To *beggar* is to defy or go past the limits of something. A *mendicancy squad* consists of the authorities who deal with mendicants, or beggars.

3. Here, *appertaining* means "belonging" or "relating."

**Analyze Description** What does this detail contribute to the description of Della and Jim's living conditions?

thereunto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young."

The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, the letters of "Dillingham" looked blurred, as though they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming<sup>4</sup> D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim" and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling—something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier-glass<sup>5</sup> between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in an \$8 flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate

conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the Queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window some day to dry just to **depreciate** Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon<sup>6</sup> been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street.

6. The Bible says that the *Queen of Sheba* visited *King Solomon*, bearing gifts that included great quantities of gold, spices, and jewels. Solomon is famous as the wisest and wealthiest man of his time.

**Analyze Description** What does the narrator compare Della's hair to?

#### Vocabulary

**depreciate** (di' prē'shē āt) *v.* to lessen the price or value of

4. *Unassuming* means "not bold or boastful."

5. A *pier-glass* (pēr' glas) is a tall, narrow mirror designed to be hung between two windows.

**Characterization** What can you tell about Della from the narrator's commentary?





*Woman at Her Toilet.* Edgar Degas. Oil pastel on paper. The Hermitage, St. Petersburg, Russia.

**View the Art** Many of Edgar Degas' paintings show people participating in everyday activities. How is the woman in the painting similar to Della?

Where she stopped the sign read: "Mme. Sofronie.<sup>7</sup> Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie."

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."

Down rippled the brown cascade.

"Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practiced hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed<sup>8</sup> metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste<sup>9</sup> in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious<sup>10</sup> ornamentation—as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's.



#### Visual Vocabulary

A fob chain is attached to a pocket watch and worn hanging from a pocket.

7. *Mme. Sofronie* (mə dam' sō frō' nē)

8. O. Henry pokes fun at himself here. His metaphor is *hashed*, or mixed, because it combines parts of the familiar phrases "rose-colored glasses" and "on gossamer wings."

9. Here, *chaste* means "modest."

10. *Meretricious* means "cheap" or "showy."

**Rewards and Sacrifices** How do you think Della feels about her sacrifice at this point?

It was like him. Quietness and value—the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to **prudence** and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages<sup>11</sup> made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends—a mammoth task.

Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

“If Jim doesn’t kill me,” she said to herself, “before he takes a second look at me, he’ll say I look like a Coney Island<sup>12</sup> chorus girl. But what could I do—oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?”

At 7 o’clock the coffee was made and the frying pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops.

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she

turned white for just a moment. She had a habit of saying little silent prayers about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: “Please God, make him think I am still pretty.”

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two—and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves.

Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

“Jim, darling,” she cried, “don’t look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold it because I couldn’t have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It’ll grow out again—you won’t mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say ‘Merry Christmas!’ Jim, and let’s be happy. You don’t know what a nice—what a beautiful, nice gift I’ve got for you.”

“You’ve cut off your hair?” asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent<sup>13</sup> fact yet even after the hardest mental labor.

“Cut it off and sold it,” said Della. “Don’t you like me just as well, anyhow? I’m me without my hair, ain’t I?”

Jim looked about the room curiously.

“You say your hair is gone?” he said, with an air almost of idiocy.

11. *Ravages* means “destructive actions or their results.”

Here, it refers to the hasty cutting of Della’s hair.

12. *Coney Island* is a famous beach and amusement park in Brooklyn, New York.

Characterization *What does this detail reveal about Jim?*

**prudence** (prōōd’ əns) n. caution; good judgment

13. Here, Jim tries to grasp the obvious (*patent*) fact that Della has cut her hair.

Analyze Description *What image of Jim does the word idiocy evoke?*



*Fifth Avenue*, 1910. Everett Shinn. Pastel on light tan laid paper, 12 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 15 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY. Gift of Samuel A. Lewisohn.

"You needn't look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered," she went on with a sudden serious sweetness, "but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?"

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction.<sup>14</sup> Eight dollars a week or a million

a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The Magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.<sup>15</sup>

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

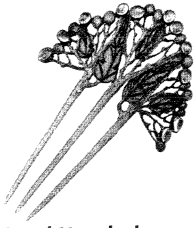
"Don't make any mistake, Dell," he said, "about me. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you'll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first."

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic

14. [*For ten seconds . . . other direction.*] O. Henry suggests that we give the couple privacy by examining some object on the other side of the room, as if we were physically in the couple's home.

15. [*This dark assertion . . . later on.*] O. Henry promises to explain, later, his statement in the preceding sentence.

scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat.



**Visual Vocabulary**  
This comb is designed both to fasten and adorn a woman's hair. Ordinary combs are used only to smooth and arrange it.

For there lay The Combs—the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped for long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jewelled rims—just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart

had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted<sup>16</sup> adornments were gone.

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: “My hair grows so fast, Jim!”

And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, “Oh, oh!”

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

16. Coveted means “strongly desired” or “wished for longingly.”

“Isn’t it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You’ll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it.”

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

“Dell,” said he, “let’s put our Christmas presents away and keep ‘em a while. They’re too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on.”

The Magi, as you know, were wise men—wonderfully wise men—who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the Magi. 🐾

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**Characterization** *What do Jim’s words reveal about his personality?*

**Rewards and Sacrifices** *O. Henry is comparing the gifts that Jim and Della exchanged with the Magi’s gifts. What does this comparison suggest about Jim’s and Della’s gifts?*



## Appointment with Love

by S. I. Kishor



**S**ix minutes to six, said the great round clock over the information booth in Grand Central Station. The tall young army lieutenant who had just come from the direction of the tracks lifted his sunburned face. His eyes narrowed to note the exact time. His heart was pounding with a beat that shocked him because he could not control it. In six minutes, he would see the woman who had filled such a special place in his life for the past thirteen months. He would meet the woman he had never seen, yet whose letters had been with him and had sustained him unfailingly.

He placed himself as close as he could to the information booth. He waited there just beyond the crowd of people besieging the clerks. . . .

Lieutenant Blandford remembered one night in particular, the worst of the fighting, when his plane had been caught in the midst of a pack of enemy fighter planes.

He had seen the grinning face of one of the enemy pilots.

In one of his letters, he had confessed to her that he often felt fear. Just a few days before this battle, he had received her answer.

"Of course you feel fear," she wrote. "All brave men do. Didn't King David know fear? That's why he wrote the twenty-third Psalm. Next time you doubt yourself, I want you to hear my voice reciting to you: 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me. . . .'"

And he *had* remembered. He had heard her voice as he imagined it to be, and it had renewed his strength and skill.

Now he was going to hear her real voice. Four minutes to six. He grew tense.

Under the immense roof, people were walking fast, like threads of color being woven into a gray web. A young woman passed close to him and Lieutenant Blandford jumped. She was wearing a red flower in the lapel of her suit. But it was a crimson carnation, not the little red rose they had agreed she would wear to identify her. Besides, this woman was too young, about eighteen years of age, whereas Hollis Meynell had told him that she was thirty.

"Well, what of it?" he had answered. "I'm thirty-two." He was twenty-nine.

His mind went back to that book—the book that had brought them together. It was one of the hundreds of army library books that had been contributed to the Florida training camp. It was called *Of Human Bondage*, and throughout the book were notes in what seemed to be a woman's

handwriting. He had always hated that habit of writing things in. But these comments were different. He had never believed that a woman could see into a man's heart so tenderly, so understandingly. Her name was on the bookplate: Hollis Meynell. He had got hold of a New York City telephone book and found her address. He had written, she had answered. Next day he had been shipped out. But they had gone on writing.

For thirteen months, she had faithfully replied—and more than replied. When his letters did not arrive, she wrote anyway. And now he believed he loved her, and she loved him.

But she had refused all his pleas to send him her photograph. That seemed rather bad, of course. But she had explained.

"If your feeling for me is real," she wrote, "what I look like won't matter. Suppose I'm beautiful. I'd always be haunted by the feeling that you had been taking a chance on just that, and that kind of love would be disappointing. Suppose I'm plain (and you must admit that this is more likely). Then I'd always feel that you kept on writing to me only because you were lonely and had no one else. No, don't ask for my picture. When you come to New York, you shall see me. Then you shall make your decision. Remember, each of us is free to stop or to go on after that—whichever we choose. . . ."

One minute to six . . .

Then Lieutenant Blandford's heart leaped higher than his plane had ever done.

A young woman was coming toward him. Her eyes were blue as flowers; her lips and chin had a gentle firmness. In her pale green suit, she was like springtime come alive.



He started toward her, entirely forgetting to notice that she was wearing no rose. Uncontrollably, he took one step closer to her. Then he saw Hollis Meynell.

She was standing almost directly behind the young woman. She was a woman well past forty. Her graying hair was tucked under a worn hat. She was more than plump, and her thick-ankled feet were thrust into low-heeled shoes. But she wore a red rose in the rumpled lapel of her brown coat.

Blandford glanced at the young woman in the green suit who was walking quickly away. His disappointment was keen. Yet deep were his feelings for the woman whose spirit had truly companioned and uplifted his own. And there she stood. Her pale, plump face was gentle and sensible. He could see that now. Her gray eyes had a warm, kindly twinkle.

Lieutenant Blandford did not hesitate. His fingers gripped the small, worn, blue leather copy of *Of Human Bondage* which

was to identify him to her. This would not be love, but it would be something precious, something perhaps even rarer than love—a friendship for which he had been and must ever be grateful. . . .

He squared his broad shoulders, saluted, and held the book out toward the woman. While he spoke, he still felt some disappointment.

"I'm Lieutenant John Blandford, and you—you are Miss Meynell. I'm so glad you could meet me. May—may I take you to dinner?"

The woman's face broadened in a pleasant smile. "I don't know what this is all about, son," she answered. "That young lady in the green suit—the one who just went by—begged me to wear this rose on my coat. And she said that if you asked me to go out with you, I should tell you that she's waiting for you in that big restaurant across the street. She said it was some kind of a test. I've got a boy in the army myself, so I didn't mind obliging."

### Thinking More About the Story

- In a letter, Hollis Meynell told Lieutenant Blandford why she did not wish to send him a photograph of herself. Think of at least one additional reason to explain why Hollis was not willing to provide a photograph.
- Do you think that the test that Hollis gave Blandford was a fair one? Was she right to have done this? Give reasons to support your answers.
- Hollis stated that, after they met, she and Blandford would be "free to stop or to go on after that—whichever we choose." Do you think that they decided to continue seeing each other? Explain your answer.



# The Secret Life of Walter Mitty

James Thurber

**W**e'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<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> looked at each other and grinned. "The Old Man'll get us



1. *Rakishly* means "in a dashing or jaunty manner."

2. A *hydroplane* is an airplane equipped with floats that allow it to take off from and land on water.

**Diction** What does the Commander's style of speaking tell you about him?

*Putting Out His Eyes*, 1919. George Horace Davis. Imperial War Museum, London.

**View the Art** Is this how you picture the first scene of the story? Why or why not?

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 back 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 pulled 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.

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Diction How does Thurber's word choice here help convey Mitty's character?

. . . "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 Mr. 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. Wish you'd take a look at him." "Glad to," said Mitty.

In the operating room there were whispered introductions: "Dr. Remington, Dr. Mitty. Mr. 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,<sup>3</sup> 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 anesthetic 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-

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3. Carrying *coals to Newcastle* would be a waste of time and energy, since Newcastle, England, is a coal-mining town.

Dreams and Reality How does Thurber tie this day-dream to what Mitty is experiencing in real life?

#### Vocabulary

**distraught** (dis trôt') *adj.* very upset; confused

**haggard** (hag' ərd) *adj.* having a worn and tired look

pocketa-queep. He began fingering delicately a row of glistening dials. "Give me a fountain pen!"<sup>4</sup> 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<sup>5</sup> has set in," said Renshaw nervously. "If you would take over, Mitty?" Mitty looked at him and at the **craven** figure of Benbow, 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<sup>6</sup> skill, and put it where it belonged.

They're so damn cocky, thought Walter Mitty, walking along Main Street; they

think they know everything. Once he had tried to take his chains<sup>7</sup> 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; they won't grin at me then. I'll have 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 had 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?<sup>8</sup> 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

4. A *fountain pen* has a reservoir or replaceable cartridge that automatically feeds a steady supply of ink to the nib, or pen point.

5. If *coreopsis* really has set in, the patient may need a gardener. This is the name of a daisy-like flowering plant.

6. *Insolent* means "so rude or proud as to be offensive."

Visualize *What details help you visualize the attendant? How does this image contrast with the image you formed of Mitty trying to park?*

#### Vocabulary

**craven** (krā' vən) *adj.* extremely cowardly

7. In some areas, people put *chains* on tires to provide better traction on ice and snow.

8. Mitty's shopping list is partially nonsense: *Carborundum* is the brand name of an industrial compound used to grind and polish, an *initiative* is a procedure enabling voters to propose new laws, and a *referendum* is a direct popular vote on a public issue.

and examined it expertly. "This is my Webley-Vickers 50.80," he said calmly.

An excited buzz ran around the courtroom. The Judge rapped for order. "You are a crack shot with any sort of firearms, I believe?" said the District Attorney, insinuatingly.<sup>9</sup> "Objection!" 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. "You miserable cur!" . . .<sup>10</sup>

"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.,<sup>11</sup>

9. Here *insinuatingly* (in sin' ū āt' ing lē) means "in a way to suggest guilt."

10. A *cur* can be either a mean, rude person or a mixed-breed dog.

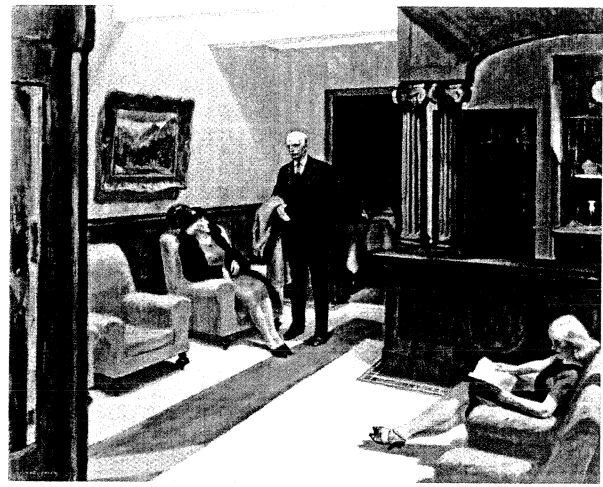
11. A. & P., short for Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, is a chain of grocery stores.

**Diction** Why does Thurber include this reference to something that does not really exist?

**Visualize** What details help you visualize this scene?

**Dictionary**

**pandemonium** (pan' də mō' nē əm) n. wild uproar



*Hotel Lobby*, 1943. Edward Hopper. Oil on canvas, 82 x 103.5 cm. Indianapolis Museum of Art, IN.

**View the Art** Edward Hopper's works often suggest that the figures depicted are alone, even if they are surrounded by others. Do the figures in this painting seem to be alone? Is this painting appropriate for the story? Explain.

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 ser-

**Dreams and Reality** What triggers this daydream for Mitty?

geant. 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 are pounding hell out of the air. Von Richtman's circus is between here and Saulier."<sup>12</sup> "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<sup>13</sup> 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-pocketa of the new flame-throwers. Walter Mitty walked to the door of the dugout humming "Auprès de Ma Blonde."<sup>14</sup> 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<sup>15</sup> 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<sup>16</sup> to the last. ☞

12. Mitty blends fantasy with the realities of World War I. *Archies* was the British name for anti-aircraft guns and their shells. *Von Richtman* suggests Manfred von Richthofen, the German flying ace known as the Red Baron. *Saulier* appears to be a made-up name for a town in France.

13. *Box barrage* refers to artillery fire used to hold back the enemy or to protect one's own soldiers.

14. "*Auprès de Ma Blonde*" (ō prā də mā blōnd) is a French song ("Near My Blonde") that was popular during World War I.

15. *Derisive* (di rī' sīv) means mocking, jeering, or ridiculing.

16. *Inscrutable* (in skrōō'tə bəl) means "mysterious."

**Diction** Why do you think Thurber describes the sound of the door as "derisive"?

#### Vocabulary

**disdainful** (dis dān' fəl) *adj.* showing scorn for something or someone regarded as unworthy

## A Boy and His Dog



My dog is old. And he farts a lot. His eyes are constantly runny on account of he's going blind. Sometimes when we go for his walk he falls down. We'll be moving right along, I'll feel an unexpected tug at his leash and bingo! he's over. The first time it happened he cried, sort of whimpered, and looked at his leg, the back one, the one that had betrayed him. I crouched in the tall grass (we take our walks in a sky-filled prairie field near the townhouses where we live) and felt the leg, which was in a spasm. I told him if it didn't work too well to just give up for a while. He seemed to know what I was telling him because he looked at me, whimpered some more, and finally flopped his head back on my leg. That's what kills me about dogs. They figure you're in charge of everything. Like if you pointed your finger, you could make a house fall down. Or if you told them everything's going to be okay, it would be.

After a couple of minutes he stood up and took off again in that businesslike, let's-get-the-show-on-the-road manner of his, sniffing, squatting to pee (he doesn't lift his leg anymore) near every bush in sight. Later, I found out he fell over because of arthritis. "Nothing you can do, really," said the vet, patting Alphonse's broad flat head. "He's just getting old, Buddy." She gave me some red pellet-shaped arthritis pills and sent us home.

After that, whenever he fell, he'd look quite cheerful. He'd lick the leg a bit, hang out his tongue, pant, and patiently wait. Just before stumbling to his feet, he'd look up like he was saying thank you — when I hadn't done anything!

I couldn't let him see how bad all this made me feel. He's so smart sometimes you have to put your hands over his ears and spell things so he won't know what you're talking about. Things like cheese, cookie, walk. All his favorites.

Mom said, "He can't last forever. Everybody dies sooner or later. It's the natural course of events. And big dogs don't live as long as little dogs."

Around our house, nobody put their hands over my ears.

Alphonse was a present for my first birthday. Dad brought him home, just a scruffy little brown pup someone was giving away. No special breed. I still have a snapshot of him and me at the party. I was this goopy-looking blond kid in blue corduroy overalls and a Donald Duck T-shirt. Alphonse was all over me in the way of puppies. I'd been startled by Dad's flash and also by Alphonse, who'd chosen

that exact moment to paw me down and slurp strawberry ice cream off my face and hands. Dad says I didn't cry or anything! Just lay bug-eyed on the shag rug with Alphonse wiggling and slopping all over me. We got on like a house on fire after that.

Which is why it's so unfair that I'm fourteen going on fifteen and he's thirteen going on ninety-four.

I guess I thought we'd just go on forever with Alphonse being my dog. Listening when I tell him stuff. When he goes, who am I going to tell my secrets to? I tell him things I wouldn't even tell Herb Malken, who is my best friend now that we've been in this city a year. My dad's always getting transferred. He's in the army. When I grow up that's one thing I'm not going to be. In the army. I won't make my kids move every three years and leave all their friends behind. Which is one thing I am going to do: have more than one kid when I get married.

There's a big myth that only children are selfish and self-centered. I can say from personal experience that only children are more likely to feel guilty and be too eager to please. It's terrible when you are one kid having to be everything to two parents.

Which is why Alphonse is more than just a dog, you see. Mom even sometimes calls him "Baby." Like he's my brother. Which it sometimes feels like.

Last week he had bad gas. I always sleep with the windows open. Even so, it got pretty awful in my bedroom.

Alphonse doesn't make much sound when he farts. Just a little "phhhht" like a balloon with a slow leak and there's

no living with him. I swear when he gets like that it would be dangerous to light a match.

I sent him out. He went obligingly. He's always been a polite dog. I listened, first to his toenails clicking over the hardwood floors, then to the scratching of his dry bristly fur as he slumped against the other side of the bedroom door. When you can't be in the same room with someone who's shared your dreams for thirteen years, it's hard to get properly relaxed. It isn't the same when they aren't near you, breathing the same air.

For the next few days he lay around more than usual. I thought perhaps he was just overtired (even though I hadn't been able to stand it and had begun to let him back into my room, farts and all). By Sunday, Mom cocked her head at him and said to Dad and me, "I don't like the way Alphonse looks. Better take him back to the vet, Buddy."

Mom works at the army base too. It's late when she and Dad get home and by that time the vet is closed for the day. So I always take Alphonse right after school. It isn't far — three blocks past the field.

Monday was the kind of fall day that makes you breathe more deeply — the field all burning colors, far-off bushes little flames of magenta and orange, dry wavy grass a pale yellow, and the big sky that kind of deep fire blue you see only once a year, in October. Alphonse didn't fall down once. Eyes half closed, he walked slowly, sniffing the air to take in messages.

A young ginger-colored cat slithered under a wooden fence and into the field. It saw Alphonse and suddenly



crouched low, eyes dark, motionless. For a minute there I didn't think he would notice it. Then his ears went up and his head shot forward. Next thing, he was hauling me along at the end of his leash, barking himself into a frenzy. The cat parted the grass like wildfire and, reaching the fence, dug its body gracelessly under at a spot where there seemed hardly an inch between wood and solid earth.

Alphonse has that effect on cats. They must think he's death on wheels the way they scatter to get out of his way. He stared proudly in the direction of the fence; his nose hadn't failed him. He walked on, a little more vigor in his step, his tongue lolling out, his ears nice and perky.

We reached the edge of the field where we usually turn around on our walks. This time, of course, we didn't. He lost some of his bounce and trailed slightly behind. I looked back. He lowered his head. "She's not going to do anything to you, you crazy dog," I told him. "She's going to shake her head again, and tell us to go home." He kept pace with me after that. Like I said, dogs believe everything you tell them.

The vet is the kind of person whose job runs her life. One minute she's smiling over a recovering patient, or one who's come in just for shots; the next, she's blowing her nose like the place is a funeral parlor. It must be murder to become so involved with your patients. She always looks as if she needs some place to hole up for a good sleep. And her legs are magnets for strays who are forever up for adoption.

At the clinic, I sat down with Alphonse resignedly

backed up between my knees. To my astonishment, a resident cat sauntered over and actually rubbed against him. Alphonse sniffed its head and then ignored it (he only likes cats who run). He watched the door to the examining room and trembled. I wondered if his eyesight was improving. With one hand I held his leash; the other I bit away at because of hangnails.

When the vet, smiling, summoned us, I got to my feet and Alphonse reluctantly pattered after me. Inside the examining room he pressed against the door, willing it to open. I picked him up and lugged him over to the table.

"He's lost weight," said the vet, stroking, prodding gently.

"He was too fat," I said, patting his stomach.

She laughed, continuing her way down his body. "Has he been on a diet?"

"No. I guess older dogs don't eat as much — like older people."

She looked at his rectum. "How long has this been here?" she said softly, more to herself than to me.

"This what?" I looked.

"It's quite a small lump," she said, pressing it hard.

Alphonse stood politely on the table, shaking and puffing.

"Sometimes," she said, with a reassuring smile, "older dogs get these lumps and they usually aren't anything to worry about, Buddy."

Usually? What did she mean, usually? My heart began to race.

"Older neutered dogs," she continued, in the same even tone, "very often get benign lumps in the anal region. But we'd better check this out, anyway. . . ."

My dog has cancer. What do I tell him now? What am I going to do? Mom and Dad have left it up to me. The vet, with strained sad eyes, says the little lump is just a symptom of what's going on inside. Why didn't I notice that he was so short of breath? That he was peeing more than usual? That he didn't eat much? That his bowels weren't working? She tells me that when dogs are old all of these things become a problem, it's the usual progress of aging. Except not in Alphonse's case. But how would I know that? I shouldn't blame myself. She says there was nothing I could have done to stop it, anyway.

So what do I tell him? Is he in pain? I couldn't stand it if he were in pain. Tonight Mom wanted to give me a sleeping pill. I refused it. Alphonse is here with me on my bed. He's going to sleep with me one last time. I'll hold him and tell him about me and what I plan to do with my life. I'll have to lie a little, fill in a few places, because I'm not exactly sure. But he has a right to know what he'll be missing. I'll have a good life, I know it, just like he's had. I'm going to tell him about it now, whisper it in his ear, and I won't leave out a single detail.

# Tickets

*by Paul Milenski*

(First appeared in Quarterly West)

*Here is an example—a perfect example—of the “short short” story, in which an entire life is revealed in a few hundred words. Although we spend very little time with Toby, we come to understand him, empathize with him, and learn from him.*

## About the Author



As a child, PAUL MILENSKI wrote in a mix of Polish (his first language) and English. Since then he has published over a hundred stories worldwide. “Tickets” alone has been translated into several languages and is featured in the school curriculum of countries as far away as New Zealand and China. Of Toby, the main character in “Tickets,” Paul writes:

“He is based on a real-life character, a retarded woman who, each day, took to railing against the injustices of society by writing out little colored slips of paper, handing them to passers-by.” Paul is a former English teacher and school superintendent who quit his educational career at age forty to fulfill his dream of becoming a writer.

T

oby Heckler placed the slip of yellow paper under the windshield wiper of the black Oldsmobile that straddled two parking spaces.

On the yellow paper Toby had printed in red ink “PRAKING MISTEAK” and signed his name “TOBY” in a childish-looking hand. He snapped the cover on his Pilot Razor Point, slipped the pen over his ear, put the pad of yellow papers in his jacket pocket. He moved down Main Street, his chin held high, his sneakers spanking white from Baby’s Liquid Shoe Polish.

As Toby passed Thom McAn, he looked in the window, caught the reflection of his sneakers, looked down at them, moved his toes inside. He straightened the pen on his ear, patted the pad of yellow papers in his pocket, moved along. People stared at Toby; he kept his chin high.

Near the First National Bank two elderly ladies waited for the bus. They stood in the middle of the sidewalk away from the curb. Toby pulled out his pad, slipped the pen off his ear, held the cap with his teeth. He printed slowly, meticulously, then handed one of the ladies the slip, “TOMUSH IN WAY” signed “TOBY.” He secured his instruments, walked along as before. The two ladies examined the slip of paper, moved closer to the curb.

At the intersection of Main and South the pedestrian crossing light shone bright orange, “DON’T WALK.” Traffic moved, people stood on the curb. A man with a pin-striped suit and briefcase stepped off the curb, was about to sneak across between cars. Toby began to reach for his pad. The cars closed together; the man stepped back to the curb. Toby brought his hand back. When the green light read “WALK,” Toby and the man crossed. The man went into a shop. Toby waited for him, handed him a slip as he came out, “ALMOST WALKD.”

Patrolman McVee stood in front of Charlie's Tobacco Shop; McVee's badge number was 635. Toby stopped, stood next to him. McVee looked over.

"How's it going, Toby?" McVee said.

Toby pulled out his pad, showed it to McVee.

"Lots of business, eh, Toby?"

Toby put his pad back, nodded. His eyes rolled, looked tortured.

"Yes, Toby, it's a bitch," McVee said.

Toby looked at McVee's shoes. Except for a single smudge they were shiny, black. Toby bent down, rubbed off the smudge with his hand.

"Thanks, Toby," McVee said.

Toby caught McVee's eye, looked down at his own sneakers.

"Very nice, Toby. Spiffy," McVee said.

Toby raised his chin again, moved along.

Before the rain came, Toby had used up half his pad. Near Mario's Grinders there was a dog tied to a parking meter; he had wrapped his leash tightly around the pole. Toby stuck a slip under his collar, "TYED WORNG." Toby walked into the YMCA, handed the man at the desk a slip, "Y

BORKEN." On a Park Square bench a man ate a candy bar; he threw his wrapper down. Toby handed him the wrapper and a slip, "PAPUR ON GARSS." The man walked away throwing both papers down. Toby caught up to him, gave him all the papers and another slip, "NOT LISSENING." The man said "Christ," put all the papers in his pocket.

The rain began to wet Toby's slips, blot his ink. He put everything away, looked up at the sky, rolled his eyes.

By the time he got back to Main and South, it was raining hard. A car moved through the intersection, splashed dirty water on his sneakers. Toby walked quickly down South, cut through the alley between Sam's Auto Supplies and Blue Arc Welding, avoided puddles on Mill, moved along the flood

control wall on River, came to his bungalow, entered.

Inside there were smells of cabbage, cigarette smoke, spilt alcohol. The entry was dark, lit intermittently with a pale light from the television. He knew his mother lay on the sofa, smoking, drinking, surrounded by TV magazines. The sofa with a large hump cast a shadow on the wall.

Toby took off his sneakers, carried them up the stairs.

His mother turned her head, "Toby, is that you?" Her voice was raspy, tired. But Toby was already in his room, the door closed, Baby's Liquid Shoe Polish in front of him on the floor.

His mother moved to the bottom of the stairs. She coughed, yelled, "Toby!"

Toby opened the door, showed himself to his mother.

She held a cigarette and a drink. "Toby, you could've been a goddamn burglar sneaking around me like that!" Toby closed the door, reached under his bed.

"Toby, you goddamn nut!"

Toby pulled out a shoebox. On the cover it read, "MUTHERS TICKITS."

Toby wrote three slips: "TO MUSH SOMKING," "TO MUSH DIRNKING," "TOO MUSH YELING." He placed the slips in the box. Then, before he put the box away, he wrote one more slip in his largest letters: "ERVYTHING WORNG!"

With the box safely under his bed, Toby sat on the floor, bit his tongue, went to polishing his sneakers spanking white.