TEXTS FOR INTERPRETATION

Сборник текстов для интерпретации (английский язык)

Учебно-методические материалы для студентов
IV курса ФГБОУ ВПО НГЛУ,
обучающихся по направлениям подготовки
035700.62 – *Лингвистика*
050100.62 – *Педагогическое образование*
032700.62 - *Филология*

Составители: Т.П. Куренкова, К.Г. Голубева, Т.Ю. Колосова

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Содержание

Введение

Настоящие учебно-методические материалы предназначены для студентов IV курса очного отделения, обучающихся по направлениям «Лингвистика», «Педагогическое образование», «Филология», и направлены на развитие умений смыслового анализа художественного произведения в процессе совершенствования коммуникативной компетенции студентов.

Пособие включает в себя законченные художественные тексты, снабженные примечаниями, снимающими лексико-грамматические и лингво-страноведческие трудности. Тексты представляют собой короткие рассказы современных английских и американских авторов и соответствуют темам IV курса: Образование и воспитание в современном мире, Любовь, брак, семья и семейные отношения, Жизнь молодежи.

Пособие дополняет теоретическую и практическую информацию по смысловой интерпретации, представленную в других учебных пособиях для студентов IV курса: A Graded English Course IV year (под ред. Т.П. Куренковой, Л.П. Загорной и др.), Смысловая интерпретация текста (под. ред. Л.П. Загорной, Т.П. Куренковой и др.). Последнее пособие включает в себя задания по смысловой интерпретации рассказов, предлагаемых в I части УММ. Рассказы, собранные во II части, рассчитаны на умение синтезировать уже имеющиеся навыки анализа художественного произведения и не сопровождаются разработанными заданиями.

ЧАСТЬ I

The Use of Force

William Carlos Williams
(1883-1963)

They were new patients to me, all I had was the name, Olson. Please come down as soon as you can, my daughter is very sick.

When I arrived I was met by the mother, a big startled looking woman, very clean and apologetic who merely said, Is this the doctor? and let me in. In the back, she added. You must excuse us, doctor, we have her in the kitchen where it is warm. It is very damp here sometimes.

The child was fully dressed and sitting on her father's lap near the kitchen table. He tried to get up, but I motioned for him not to bother, took off my overcoat and started to look things over. I could see that they were all very nervous, eyeing me up and down distrustfully. As often, in such cases, they weren't telling me more than they had to, it was up to me to tell them; that's why they were spending three dollars[1], on me.

The child was fairly eating me up with her cold steady eyes, and no expression to her face whatsoever. She did not move and seemed, inwardly, quiet; an unusually attractive little thing, and as strong as a heifer in appearance. But her face was flushed, she was breathing rapidly, and I realized that she had a high fever.[2] She had magnificent blonde hair, in profusion. One of those picture children often reproduced in advertising leaflets and the photogravure sections of the Sunday papers.

She's had a fever for three days, began the father, and we don't know what it comes from. My wife has given her things, you know, like people do, but it don't[3] do no good. And there's been a lot of sickness around. So we tho't[4] you'd better look her over and tell us what is the matter.

As doctors often do I took a trial shot[5] at it as a point of departure. Had she had a sore throat?

Both parents answered me together. No... No, she says her throat don't hurt her.

Does your throat hurt you? added the mother to the child. But the little girl's expression didn't change nor did she move her eyes from my face.

Have you looked?

I tried to, said the mother, but I couldn't see.

As it happens we had been having a number of cases of diphtheria in the school to which this child went during that month and we were all, quite apparently; thinking of that, though no one had as yet spoken of the thing.

Well, I said, suppose we take a look at the throat first. I smiled in my best professional manner and asking for the child's first name I said, come on, Mathilda, open your mouth and let's take a look at your throat.

Nothing doing.

Aw, come on, I coaxed, just open your mouth wide and let me take a look. Look, I said, opening both hands wide, I haven't anything in my hands. Just open up and let. Me see.

Such a nice man, put in the mother. Look, how kind he is to you. Come on, do what he tells you to. He won't hurt you.

At that I ground my teeth in disgust. If only they wouldn't use the word "hurt" I might be able to get somewhere. But I did not allow myself to be hurried or disturbed but speaking quietly and slowly I approached the child again.

As I moved my chair a little nearer suddenly with one catlike movement both her hands clawed instinctively for my eyes and she almost reached them too. In fact she knocked my glasses flying and they fell, though unbroken, several feet away from me on the kitchen floor.

Both the mother and father almost turned themselves inside out in embarrassment and apology. You bad girl, said the mother, taking her and shaking her by one arm. Look what you've done. The nice man...

For heaven's sake, I broke in. Don't call me a nice man to her. I'm here to look at her throat on the chance that she might have diphtheria and possibly die of it. But that's nothing to her. Look here, I said to the child, we're going to look at your throat. You're old enough to understand what I'm saying. Will you open it now by yourself or shall we have to open it for you?

Not a move. Even her expression hadn't changed. Her breaths however were coming faster and faster. Then the battle began. I had to do it. I had to have a throat culture[6] for her own protection. But first I told the parents that it was entirely up to them. I explained the danger but said that I would, not insist on a throat examination so long as they would take the responsibility.

If you don't do what the doctor says you'll have to go to the hospital, the mother admonished her severely.

Oh yeah? I had to smile to myself. After all, I had already fallen in love with the savage brat, the parents were contemptible to me. In the .ensuing struggle they grew more and more abject, crushed, exhausted while she surely rose to magnificent heights of insane fury of effort bred of her terror of me.

The father tried his best, and he was a big man but the fact that she was his daughter, his shame at her behaviour and his dread of hurting her made him release her just at the critical moment several times when I had almost achieved success, till I wanted to kill him. But his dread also that she might have diphtheria made him tell me to go on, though he himself was almost fainting, while the mother moved back and forth behind us raising and lowering her hands in an agony of apprehension.

Put her in front of you on your lap, I ordered, and hold both her wrists.

But as soon as he did the child let out a scream. Don't, you're hurting me. Let go off my hands. Let them go I tell you. Then she shrieked terrifyingly, hysterically. Stop it! Stop it! You're killing me!

Do you think she can stand it, doctor! said the mother.

You get out, said the husband to his wife. Do you want her to die of diphtheria?

Come on now, hold her, I said.

Then I grasped the child's head with my left hand and tried to get the wooden tongue depressor between her teeth. She fought, with clenched teeth, desperately! But now I also had grown furious — at .a child. I tried to hold myself down but I couldn't. I know how to expose a throat for inspection. And I did my best. When finally I got the wooden spatula behind the last teeth and just the point of it into the mouth cavity, she opened up for an instant but before I could see anything she came down again and gripping the wooden blade between her molars she reduced it to splinters before I could get it out again.

Aren't you ashamed to act like that in front of the doctor?

Get me a smooth-handled spoon of some sort, I told the mother. We're going through this. The child's mouth was already bleeding. Her tongue was cut and she was screaming in wild hysterical shrieks, Perhaps I should have desisted and come back in an hour or more. No doubt it would have been better. But I have seen at least two children lying dead in bed of neglect in such cases, and feeling that I must get a diagnosis now or never I went at it again. But the worst of it was that I too had got beyond reason. I could have torn the child apart in my own fury and enjoyed it. It was a pleasure to attack her. My face was burning with it.

The damned little brat must be protected against her own idiocy, one says to one's self at such times. Others must be protected against her. It is a social necessity. And all these things are true. But a blind fury, a feeling of adult shame, bred of a longing for muscular release are the opera-lives. One goes on to the end.

In a final unreasoning assault I overpowered the child's neck and jaws. I forced the heavy silver spoon back of her teeth and down her throat till she gagged. And there it was — both tonsils covered with membrane. She had fought valiantly to keep me from knowing her secret. She had been hiding that sore throat for three days at least and lying to her parents in order to escape just such an outcome as this.

Now truly she was furious. She had been on the defensive. Before now she attacked. Tried to get off her father’s lap and fly at me while tears of defeat blinded her eyes.

Notes

1. **three dollars** - the fee is of the early fifties, it has now soared up at least 400%.
2. **she had a high fever** — she was running a (very high) temperature. Fever (med.) is a body temperature above its regular or normal level. In adults the average normal body temperature is 98.6° Fahrenheit, when measured by a fever thermometer placed in the mouth (oral temperature). The temperature taken under the armpits is about 1 degree lower (97.5°F). High fever usually means a temperature between 103°F and 105°F.

3. 4 **don't for doesn't, tho't** for **thought** and some other instances of the same kind of ungrammatical forms are"probably used to remind the reader of the foreign name, Olson.
5. **took a trial shot** — med. made an attempt to diagnose the case in question.
6. **a throat culture** — med. sample of throat tissue to be tested for infection in a laboratory.

The Story-Teller

Saki (Hector Hugh Munro)
(1870-1916)

It was a hot afternoon, and the railway carriage was correspondingly sultry, and the next stop was at Templecombe, nearly an hour ahead. The occupants of the carriage were a small girl, and a smaller girl, and a small boy. An aunt belonging to the children occupied one corner seat, and the further corner seat on the opposite side was occupied by a bachelor who was a stranger to their party, but the small girl and the small boy emphatically occupied the compartment. Both the aunt and the children were conversational in a limited, persistent way, reminding one of the attentions of a housefly that refused to be discouraged. Most of the aunt's remarks seemed to begin with "Don't", and nearly all of the children's remarks began with "Why?" The bachelor said nothing out loud.

"Don't, Cyril, don't," exclaimed the aunt, as the small boy began smacking the cushions of the seat, producing a cloud of dust at each blow.

"Come and look out of the window," she added.

The child moved reluctantly to the window. "Why are those sheep being driven out of that field?" he asked.

"I expect they are being driven to another field when there is more grass." said the aunt weakly.

But there is lots of grass in that field." protested the boy; "there's nothing else but grass there. Aunt, there're lots of grass in that field."

"Perhaps the grass in the other field is better," suggested the aunt fatuously.

"Why is it better?" came the swift, inevitable question.

"Oh, look at those cows!" exclaimed the aunt. Nearly every field along the line contained cows or bullocks, but she spoke as though she were drawing attention to a rarity.

"Why is the grass in the other field better?" persisted Cyril.

The frown on the bachelor's face was deepening to a scowl. He was a hard, unsympathetic man, the aunt decided in her mind. She was utterly unable to come to any satisfactory decision about the grass in the other field.

The smaller girl created a diversion by beginning to recite "*On the Road to Mandalay*".[1] She only knew the first line, but she put her limited knowledge to the fullest possible use. She repeated the line over and over again in a dreamy but resolute and very audible voice; it seemed to the bachelor as though someone had had a bet with her that she could not repeat the line aloud two

thousand times, without stopping. Whoever it was who had made the wager was likely to lose his bet.

"Come over here and listen to a story", said the aunt, when the bachelor had looked twice at her and once at the communication cord.

The children moved listlessly towards the aunt's end of the carriage. Evidently her reputation as a story-teller did not rank high in their estimation.

In a low, confidential voice, interrupted at frequent intervals by loud, petulant questions from her listeners, she began an unenterprising and deplorably uninteresting story about a little girl who was good and made friends with everyone on account of her goodness and was finally saved from a mad bull by a number of rescuers who admired her moral character.

"Wouldn't they have saved her if she hadn't been good?" demanded the bigger of the small girls. It was exactly the question that the bachelor had wanted to ask.

"Well, yes," admitted the aunt lamely, "but I don't think they would have run quite so fast to her help if they had not liked her so much."

"It's the stupidest story I've ever heard, said the bigger of the small girls with immense conviction.

"I didn't listen after the first bit, it was so stupid," said Cyril.

The smaller girl made no actual comment on the story, but she had long ago recommenced a murmured repetition of her favourite line.

"You don't seem to be a success as a story-teller," said the bachelor suddenly[2] from his corner.

The aunt bristled in instant defence at this unexpected[3] attack.

"It's a very difficult thing to tell stories that children can both understand and appreciate," she said stiffly.

"I don't agree with you," said the bachelor.

"Perhaps you would like to tell them a story," was the aunt's retort.

"Tell us a story," demanded the bigger of the small girls.

"Once upon a time," began the bachelor, "there was a little girl called Bertha, who was extraordinarily good.

The children's momentarily-aroused interest began at once to flicker; all stories seemed dreadfully alike, no matter who told them.

"She did all that she was told, she was always truthful, she kept her clothes clean, ate milk puddings as though they were jam tarts, learned her lessons perfectly, and was polite in her manners.

"Was she pretty?" asked the bigger of the small girls. "Not as pretty as any of you," said the bachelor, "but she was horribly good."

There was a wave of reaction in favour of the story; the word horrible in connection with goodness was a novelty that commended itself. It seemed to introduce a ring of truth that was absent from the aunt's tales of infant life.

"She was so good," continued the bachelor, "that she won several medals for goodness, which she always wore pinned on her dress. There was a medal

for obedience, another medal for punctuality, and a third for good behaviour. They were large metal medals and they clinked against one another as she walked. No other child in the town where she lived had as many as three medals, so everybody knew that she must be an extra good child."

"Horribly good," quoted Cyril.

"Everybody talked about her goodness, and the Prince of the country got to hear about it, and he said that as she was so very good she might be allowed once a week to walk in his park, which was just outside the town. It was a beautiful park, and no children were ever allowed in it, so it was a great honour for Bertha to be allowed to go there."

"Were there any sheep in the park?" demanded Cyril.

"No," said the bachelor, "there were no sheep."

"Why weren't there any sheep?" came the inevitable question arising out of that answer.

The aunt permitted herself a smile, which might almost have been described as a grin.

"There were no sheep in the park," said the bachelor, "because the Prince's mother had once had a dream that her son would either be killed by a sheep or else by a clock, falling on him. For that reason the Prince never kept a sheep in his park or a clock m his palace."

The aunt suppressed a gasp of admiration

"Was the Prince killed by a sheep or by a clock?" asked Cyril.

"He is still alive, so we can't tell whether the dream will come true," said the bachelor unconcernedly; "anyway there were no sheep in the park, but there were lots of little pigs running all over the place."

"What colour were they?"

"Black with white faces, white with black spots, black all over, grey with white patches, and some were white all over."

The story-teller paused to let a full idea of the park's treasures sink into the children's imagination; then he resumed:

"Bertha was rather sorry to find that there were no flowers in the park. She had promised her aunts, with tears in her eyes, that she would not pick any of the kind Princes’s flowers, and she had meant to keep her promise, so of course it made her feel silly to find that there were no flowers to pick."

"Why weren't there any flowers?"

"Because the pigs had eaten them all," said the bachelor promptly.

“The gardeners had told the Prince that you couldn’t have pigs and flowers, so he decided to have pigs and no flowers."

There was a murmur of approval at the excellence of the Prince's decision; so many people would have decided the other way.

“There were lots of other delightful things in the park. There were ponds with gold and blue and green fish in them, and trees with beautiful parrots that said clever things at a moment's notice, and humming birds that hummmed all

the popular tunes of the day. Bertha walked up and down and enjoyed herself immensely, and thought to herself: 'If I were not so extraordinarily good I should not have been allowed to come into this beautiful park and enjoy all that there is to be seen in it,' and her three medals clinked against one another as she walked and helped to remind her how very good she really was. Just then an enormous wolf came prowling into the park to see if it could catch a fat little pig for its supper."

"What colour was it?" asked the children, amid an immediate quickening of interest.

"Mud-colour all over, with a black tongue and pale grey eyes that gleamed with unspeakable ferocity. The first thing that it saw in the park was Bertha; her pinafore was so spotlessly white and clean that it could be seen from a great distance. Bertha saw the wolf and saw that it was stealing towards her, and she began to wish that she had never been allowed to come into the park. She ran as hard as she could, and the wolf came after her with huge leaps and bounds. She managed to reach a shrubbery of myrtle bushes and she hid herself in one of the thickest of the bushes. The wolf came sniffing among the branches, its black tongue lolling out of its mouth and its pale grey eyes glaring with rage. Bertha was terribly frightened, and thought to herself: 'I had not been so extraordinarily good I should have been safe in the town at this moment.' However, the scent of the myrtle was so strong that the wolf could not sniff out where Bertha was hiding, and the bushes were so thick that he might have hunted about in them for a long time without catching sight of her, so he thought he might as well go off and catch a little pig instead. Bertha was trembling very much at having the wolf prowling and sniffing so near her, and as she trembled the medal for obedience clinked against the medals for good conduct and punctuality. The wolf was just moving away when he heard the sound of the medals clinking and stopped to listen; they clinked again in a quite near him. He dashed into the bush, his pale eyes gleaning with ferocity and triumph, and dragged Bertha out and devoured her to the last morsel. All that was left of her were her shoes, bits of clothing, and the three medals for goodness."

"Were any of the little pigs killed?"

"No, they all escaped."

"The story began badly," said the smaller of the small girls, "but it had a beautiful ending."

"It is the most beautiful story that I ever heard," said the bigger of the small girls, with immense decision.

"It is the only beautiful story I have ever heard," said Cyril.

A dissentient opinion came from the aunt.

"A most improper story to tell to young children! You have undermined the effect of years of careful teaching."

"At any rate," said the bachelor, collecting his belongings preparatory to leaving the carriage, "I kept them quiet for ten minutes, which was more than you were able to do."

"Unhappy woman!" he observed to himself as he walked down the platform of Templecombe station; "for the next six months or so these children will assail her in public with demands for an improper story!"

Notes

1. **On the Road to Mandalay** — a poem by Joseph Rudyard Kipling (1865—1936).

The Fight

Dylan Thomas
(1914-1953)

I was standing at the end of the lower playground and annoying Mr. Samuels, who lived in the house just below the high railings. Mr. Samuels complained once a week that boys from the school threw apples and stones and balls through his bedroom window. He sat in a deck-chair in a small square of trim garden and tried to read the newspaper. I was only a few yards from him. I was staring him out. He pretended not to notice me, but I knew he knew I was standing there rudely and quietly. Every now and then he peeped at me from behind his newspaper, saw me still and serious and alone, with my eyes on his. As soon as he lost his temper I was going to go home. Already I was late for dinner. I had almost beaten him, the newspaper was trembling, he was breathing heavily, when a strange boy, whom I had not heard approach, pushed me down the bank.

I threw a stone at his face. He took off his spectacles, put them in his coat pocket, took off his coat, hung it neatly on the railings, and attacked. Turning round as we wrestled on the top of the bank, I saw that Mr. Samuels had folded his newspaper on the deck-chair and was standing up to watch us. It was a mistake to turn round. The strange boy rabbit-punched me twice. Mr. Samuels hopped with excitement and I fell against the railings. I was down in the dust, hot and scratched and biting, then up and dancing, and I butted the boy in the belly and we tumbled in a heap. I saw through a closing eye that his nose was bleeding. I hit his nose. He tore at my collar and spun me round by the hair.

‘Come on! Come on!’ I heard Mr. Samuels cry.

We both turned towards him. He was shaking his fists and dodging about in the garden. He stopped then, and coughed, and set his panama straight, and avoided our eyes, and turned his back and walked slowly to the deck-chair.

We both threw gravel at him.

‘I’ll give him “Come on!”’ the boy said, as we ran along the playground away from the shouts of Mr. Samuels and down the steps on to the hill. We

walked home together. I admired his bloody nose. He said that my eye was like a poached egg, only black.

"I've never seen such a lot of blood,' I said.

He said I had the best black eye in Wales, perhaps it was the best black eye in Europe; he bet Tunney never had a black eye like that.

'And there's blood all over your shirt.'

'Sometimes I bleed in dollops,' he said.

On Walter's Road we passed a group of high school girls, and I cocked my cap and hoped my eye was as big as a bluebag, and he walked with his coat flung open to show the bloodstains.

I was a hooligan all during dinner, and a bully, and as bad as a boy from the Sandbanks, and I should have more respect, and I sat silently, like Tunney, over the sago pudding. That afternoon I went to school with an eye-shade on. If I had had a black silk sling I would have been as gay and desperate as the wounded captain in the book that my sister used to read, and that I read under the bedclothes at night, secretly with a flash-lamp.

On the road, a boy from an inferior school, where the parents did not have to pay anything, called me 'One eye!' in a harsh, adult voice. I tool no notice, but walked along whistling, my good eye on the summer clouds sailing, beyond insult, above Terrace Road.

The mathematics master said: 'I see that Mr. Thomas at the back of the class has been straining his eyesight. But it isn't over his homework, is it, gentlemen?'

Gilbert Rees, next to me, laughed loudest.

'I'll break your leg after school!' I said.

He'd hobble, howling, up to the head master's study. A deep hush in the school. A message on a plate brought by the porter. 'The head master's compliments, sir, and will you come at once?' 'How did you happen to break this boy's leg?' 'Oh, damn and bottom, the agony!' cried Gilbert Rees. 'Just a little twist,' I would say. 'I don't know my own strength. I apologize. But there's nothing to worry about. Let me set the leg, sir.' A rapid manipulation, the click of a bone. 'Doctor Thomas, sir, at your service.' Mrs. Rees was on her knees. 'How can I thank you?' 'It's nothing at all, dear lady. Wash his ears every morning. Throw away his rulers. Pour his red and green inks down the sink.'

In the evening, before calling on my new friend, I sat in my bedroom by the boiler and read through my exercise-books full of poems. On my bedroom walls were pictures of Shakespeare, Walter de la Mare torn from my father's *Christmas Bookman* , Robert Browning, Stacy Aumonier, Rupert Brooke, a bearded man who I had discovered was Whittier, Watts's 'Hope' and a Sunday school certificate I was ashamed to want to pull down. A poem I had had printed in the 'Wales Day by Day' column of the *Western Mail* was pasted on the mirror to make me blush, but the shame of the poem had died. Across the poem I had written, with a stolen quill and in flourishes: 'Homer Nods.' I was always

waiting for the opportunity to bring someone into my bedroom – 'Come into my den; excuse the untidiness; take a chair. No! not that one, it's broken!' – and force him to see the poem accidentally. 'I put it there to make me blush.' But nobody ever came in except my mother. […]

My new friend's mother answered the door with a ball of wool in her hand. Dan, in the upstairs drawing-room, heard my arrival and played the piano faster. 'I didn't hear you come in,' he said when I found him. He finished on a grand chord, stretching all his fingers.

The room was splendidly untidy, full of wool and paper and open cupboards stacked with things you could never find; all the expensive furniture had been kicked; a waist-coat hung on the chandelier. I thought I could live for ever and ever in that room, writing and fighting and spilling ink, having my friends for picnics there after midnight.

He showed me his books and his seven novels. All the novels were about battles, sieges, and kings. 'Just early stuff,' he said.

He let me take out his violin and make a cat noise.

We sat in a sofa in the window and talked as though we had always known each other. […]

I read him an exercise-book full of poems. He listened wisely, like a boy aged a hundred, his head on one side and his spectacles shaking on his swollen nose. […]

Nobody had ever listened like that before. The school had vanished, leaving on Mount Pleasant hill a deep hole that smelt of cloakrooms and locker mice, and 'Warmley' shone in the dark of a town I did not know. In the still room, that had never been strange to me, sitting in heaps of coloured wool, swollen-nosed and one-eyed, we acknowledged our gifts. The future spread beyond the window, over Singleton Park crowded with lovers messing about, and into smoky London paved with poems. […]

Notes

1. **Tunney**, Gene – an American boxer, a heavy-weight champion who won that title in 1927.
2. **High school –** senior forms of secondary school.
3. **From the Sandbanks** – *here*, from an institution for juvenile delinquents.
4. **That afternoon I went to school** – the boy had lessons in the afternoon.
5. **Damn and bottom** – rude words.
6. **Walter de la Mare** – English poet (1873-1956)
7. **Christmas Bookman –** an illustrated publication advertising books.
8. **Robert Browning** (1812-1889) – English poet.
9. **Stacy Aumonier** (1887-1928) – English novelist.
10. **Rupert Brooke** (1887-1915) – English poet.
11. **Whittier, John Greenleaf** (1807-1892) – American poet.
12. **Watts, Isaac** (1674-1748) – hymn writer.
13. **The Western Mail** – name of a local periodical.

Village School

Laurie Lee
(born 1913)

The village to which our family had come was a scattering of some twenty to thirty houses down the south-east slope of a valley. The valley was narrow, steep, and almost entirely cut off; it was also a funnel for winds, a channel for the floods and a jungly, bird-crammed, insect-hopping sun-trap whenever there happened to be any sun. It was not high and open like the Windrush country, but had secret origins, having been gouged from the Escarpment by the melting ice-caps some time before we got there. The old flood-terraces still showed on the slopes, along which the cows walked sideways. Like an island, it was possessed of curious survivals – rare orchids and Roman snails; and there were chemical qualities in the limestone-springs which gave the women pre-Raphaelite goitres. The sides of the valley were rich in pasture and the crests heavily covered in beechwoods.

Living down there was like living in a bean-pod, one could see nothing but the bed one lay in. Our horizon of woods was the limit of our world. For weeks on end the trees moved in the wind with a dry roaring that seemed a natural utterance of the landscape. In winter they ringed us with frozen spikes, and in summer they oozed over the lips of the hills like layers of thick green lava. Mornings, they steamed with mist or sunshine, and almost every evening threw streamers above us, reflecting sunsets we were too hidden to see.

Water was the most active thing in the valley, arriving in the long rains from Wales. It would drip all day from clouds and trees, from roofs and eaves and noses. It broke open roads, carved its way through gardens, and filled the ditches with sucking noises. Men and horses walked about in wet sacking, birds shook rainbows from sodden branches, and streams ran from holes, and back into holes, like noisy underground trains.

I remember, too, the light on the slopes, long shadows in tufts and hollows, with cattle, brilliant as painted china, treading their echoing shapes. Bees blew like cake-crumbs through the golden air, white butterflies like sugared wafers, and when it wasn't raining a diamond dust took over, which veiled and yet magnified all things.

Most of the cottages were built of Cotswold stone and were roofed by split-stone tiles. The tiles grew a kind of golden moss which sparkled like crystallized honey. Behind the cottages were long steep gardens full of cabbages, fruit-bushes, roses, rabbit-hutches, earth-closets, bicycles, and pigeon-lofts. In the very sump of the valley wallowed the Squire's Big House – once a fine, though modest sixteenth-century manor, to which a Georgian façade had been added.

The villagers themselves had three ways of living: working for the Squire, or on the farms, or down in the cloth-mills at Stroud. Apart from the Manor, and the ample cottage gardens – which were an insurance against hard times – all

other needs were supplied by a church, a chapel, a vicarage, a manse, a wooden hut, a pub – and the village school.

The village school at that time provided all the instruction we were likely to ask for. It was a small stone barn divided by a wooden partition into two rooms – The Infants and The Big Ones. There was one dame teacher, and perhaps a young girl assistant. Every child in the valley crowding there, remained till he was fourteen years old, then was presented to the working field or factory with nothing in his head more burdensome than a few mnemonics, a jumbled list of wars, and a dreamy image of the world's geography. It seemed enough to get by with, in any case; and was one up on our poor old grandparents.

This school, when I came to it, was at its peak. Universal education and unusual fertility had packed it to the walls with pupils. Wild boys and girls from miles around – from the outlying farms and half-hidden hovels way up at the ends of the valley – swept down each day to add to our numbers, bringing with them strange oaths and odours, quaint garments and curious pies. They were my first amazed vision of any world outside the womanly warmth of my family; I didn't expect to survive it for long, and I was confronted with it at the age of four.

The morning came, without any warning, when my sisters surrounded me, wrapped me in scarves, tied up my boot-laces, thrust a cap on my head, and stuffed a baked potato in my pocket.

'What's this?' I said.

'You are starting school today.'

'I ain't. I'm stopping 'ome.'

'Now, come on, Loll. You are a big boy now.'

'I aint.'

'You are.'

'Boo-hoo.'

They picked me up bodily, kicking and bawling, and carried me up to the road.

'Boys who don't go to school get put into boxes, and turn into rabbits, and get chopped up Sundays.'

I felt this was overdoing it rather, but I said no more after that. I arrived at the school just three feet tall and fatly wrapped up in my scarves. The playground roared like a rodeo and the potato burned through my thigh. Old boots, ragged stockings, torn trousers and skirts, went skating and skidding around me. The rabble closed in, I was encircled; grit flew in my face like shrapnel. Tall girls with frizzled hair, and huge boys with sharp elbows, began to prod me with hideous interest. They plucked at my scarves, spun me round like a top, screwed my nose, and stole my potato.

I was rescued at last by a gracious lady – the sixteen-year-old junior-teacher – who boxed a few ears and dried my face and led me off to The Infants. I spent that first day picking holes in paper, then went home in smoldering temper.

‘What’s the matter, Loll?’ Didn’t he like it at school then?’

‘They never gave me the present.’

‘Present? What present?’

‘They said they’d give me a present.’

‘Well, now, I’m sure they didn’t.’

They did. They said: “You are Laurie Lee, ain’t you? Well, just you sit there for the present.” I sat there all day but I never got it. I ain’t going back there again.’

But after a week I felt like a veteran and grew as ruthless as anyone else. Somebody had stolen my baked potato, so I swiped somebody else’s apple. The Infant room was packed with toys such as I’d never seen before – coloured shapes and rolls of clay, stuffed birds and men to paint. Also a frame of counting beads which our young teacher played like a harp, leaning her bosom against our faces and guiding our wandering fingers…

The beautiful assistant left us at last, and was replaced by an opulent widow. She was tall and smelt like a cart-load of lavender; and wore a hair-net, which I thought was a wig. I remember going close up and having a good look – it was clearly too square to be hair.

‘What are you staring at?’ the widow inquired.

I was much too soft-hearted to answer.

‘Go on. Do tell. You needn’t be shy.’

‘You are wearing a wig,’ I said.

‘I can assure you I am not!’ She went very red.

‘You are. I seen it,’ I said.

The new teacher grew flustered and curiously cross. She took me upon her knee.

‘Now look very close. Is that really a wig?’

I looked hard, saw the net and said, ‘Yes.’

‘Well, really!’ she said, while the infants gaped. ‘I can assure you it’s not a wig! And if you only could watch me getting dressed in the morning you’d know it wasn’t one either.’

She shook me from her knee like a sodden cat, but she’d stirred my imagination. To suggest I might watch her getting dressed in the morning seemed to me both outrageous and wonderful.

This tiny, whitewashed Infants’ room was a brief but cosy anarchy. In that short time allowed us we played and wept, broke things, fell asleep, cheeked the teacher, discovered the things we could do to each other, and exhaled our last guiltless days.

My desk companions were those two blonde girls, already puppyishly pretty, whose names and bodies were to distract and haunt me for the next fifteen years of my life. Poppy and Jo were limpet chums; they sat holding hands all day; and there was a female self-possession about their pink sticky faces that made me shout angrily at them.

Vera was another I studied and liked; she was lonely, fuzzy, and short. I felt a curious compassion for stumpy Vera, and it was through her, and no beauty, that I got into trouble and got the first public shock of my life. How it happened was simple, and I was innocent, so it seemed. She came up to me in the playground one morning and held her face close to mine. I had a stick in my hand, so I hit her on the head with it. Her hair was springy, so I hit her again and watched her mouth open up with a yell.

To my surprise a commotion broke out around me, cries of scandal from the older girls, exclamations of horror and heavy censure mixed with Vera's sobbing wails. I was intrigued, not alarmed, that by wielding a beech stick I was able to cause such a stir. So I hit her again, without spite or passion, then walked off to try something else.

The experiment might have ended there, and having ended would have been forgotten. But no; angry faces surrounded me, very red, all spitting and scolding.

'Horrid boy! Poor Vera! Little monster! Urgh! We're going to tell teacher about you!'

Something was wrong, the world seemed upset, I began to feel vaguely uneasy. I had only hit Vera on her wiry black hair, and now everybody was shouting at me. I ran and hid, feeling sure it would pass, but they hunted me down in the end. Two big righteous girls hauled me out by the ears.

'You're wanted in the Big Room, for 'itting Vera. You're 'alf going to cop it!' they said.

So I was dragged to that Room, where I'd never been before, and under the savage eyes of the elder children teacher gave me a scalding lecture. I was confused by now and shaking with guilt. At last I smirked and ran out of the room. I had learned my first lesson, that I could not hit Vera, no matter how fuzzy her hair.

And something else too, that the summons to the Big Room, the policeman's hand on the shoulder, comes almost always as a complete surprise, and for the crime that one has forgotten.

My brother Jack, who was with me in the Infants, was too clever to stay there long. Indeed he was so bright he made us uncomfortable, and we were all of us glad to get rid of him. Sitting pale in his pinafore, gravely studying, commanding the teacher to bring him fresh books, or to sharpen his pencils, or to make less noise, he was an Infant Freak from the start. So he was promoted to the Big Room with unprecedented promptness, given a desk and a dozen atlases to sit on, from which he continued to bully the teachers in that cold clear voice of his.

But I, myself, was a natural Infant, content to serve out my time, to slop around and whine and idle: and no one suggested I shouldn't. So I remained long after bright Jack had moved on, the fat lord of my nursery life, skilled at cutting out men from paper, chalking suns on the walls, making snakes from

clay, idling voluptuously through the milky days with a new young teacher to feed on. But my time was slowly running out; my Big Room bumps were growing. Suddenly, almost to my dismay, I found that I could count up to a hundred, could write my name in both small and large letters, and subtract certain numbers from each other. I had even just succeeded in subtracting Poppy from Jo, when the call came down from on high. Infant no longer, I was being moved up – the Big Room was ready for me.

I found there a world both adult and tough, with long desks and inkwells, strange maps on the walls, huge boys, heavy boots, scratching pens, groans of labour, and sharp and sudden persecutions. Gone for ever were the infant excuses, the sanctuary of lisping charms. Now I was alone and unprotected, faced by a struggle which required new techniques, where one made pacts and split them, made friends and betrayed them, and fought for one's place near the stove.

The stove was a symbol of caste among us, the tub of warmth to which we cleaved during the long seven months of winter. It was made of cast-iron and had a noisy mouth which rattled coke and breathed out fumes. It was decorated by a tortoise labelled 'Slow But Sure', and in winter it turned red hot. If you pressed a pencil against it, the wood burst into flames; and if you spat at the top, the spit hopped and gamboled like tiny ping-pong balls.

My first days in the Big Room were spent in regret for the young teacher I'd left in the Infants, foe her braided breasts and unbuttoning hands and her voice of sleepy love. Quite clearly the Big Room boasted no such comforts; Miss B., the Head Teacher, to whom I was now delivered, being about as physically soothing as a rake.

She was a bunched and punitive little body and the school had christened her Crabby, she had a sore yellow look, lank hair coiled in earphones, and the skin and voice of a turkey. We were all afraid of the gobbling Miss B, she spied, she pried, she crouched, she crept, she pounced – she was a terror.

Each morning was war without declaration; no one knew who would catch it next. We stood to attention, half-crippled in our desks, till Miss B walked in, whacked the walls with a ruler, and fixed us with her squinting eye. 'Good a-morning, children!' 'Good morning, teacher!' The greeting was like a rattling of swords. Then she would scowl at the floor and begin to growl 'Ar Farthet…' at which we said the Lord's Prayer, praised all good things, and thanked God for the health of our King. But scarcely had we bellowed the last Amen than Crabby coiled, uncoiled, and sprang, and knocked some poor boy sideways.

One seldom knew why; one was always off guard, for the punishment preceded the charge. The charge, however, followed hard upon it, to a light shower of angry spitting.

'Shuffling your feet! Playing with the desk! A-smirking at that miserable Betty! I will not have it. I'll not, I say. I repeat – I will not have it!'

Many a punch-drunk boy in a playground battle, outnumbered and beaten to his knees, would be heard to cry: 'I will not have it! I'll not, I say! I repeats, I will not have it!' It was an appeal to the code of our common suffering, and called for immediate mercy.

So we did not much approve of Crabby – though she was responsible for our excellent reflexes. Apart from this, her teaching was not memorable. She appears in my recollection as merely a militant figure, a hunched-up little creature all spring-coils and slaps – not a monster by any means, but a natural manifestation of what we expected of school.

For school in my day, that day, Crabby's day, seemed to be designed simply to keep us out of the air and from following the normal pursuits of the fields. Crabby's science of dates and sums and writing seemed a typical invention of her own, a sour form of fiddling or prison labour like picking oakum or sewing sacks.

So while the bright times passed, we sat locked in our stocks, our bent backs turned on the valley. The June air infected us with primitive hungers, grass-seed and thistledown idled through the windows, we smelt the fields and were tormented by cuckoos, while every out of door sound that came drifting in was a sharp nudge in the solar plexus. The creaking of wagons going past the school, harness-jingle, and the cries of the carters, the calling of cows from the 17-Acre, Fletcher's chattering mower, gunshot from the warrens – all tugged and pulled at our active wishes till we could have done Miss B a murder.

And indeed there came the inevitable day when rebellion raised its standard, when the tension was broken and a hero emerged whom we would willingly have named streets after. At least, from that day his name was honoured, though we gave him little support at the time…

Spadge Hopkings it was, and I must say we were surprised. He was one of those heavy, full-grown boys, thick-legged, red-fisted, bursting with flesh, designed for the great outdoors. He was nearly fourteen by then, and physically out of scale – at least so far as our school was concerned. The sight of him squeezed into his tiny desk was worse that a bullock in ballet-shoes. He wasn't much of a scholar; he groaned as he worked, or hacked at his desk with a jack-knife. Miss B took her pleasure in goading him, in forcing him to read out loud; or asking him sudden unintelligible questions which made him flush and stumble.

The great day came; a day of shimmering summer, with the valley outside in a state of leafy levitation. Crabby B was at her sourest, and Spadge Hopkings had had enough. He began to writhe in his desk, and roll his eyes, and kick with his boots, and mutter; 'She'd better look out. 'Er, - Crabby B. She'd better, that's all. I can tell you …'

We didn't quite know what the matter was, in spite of his meaning looks. Then he threw down his pen, said: 'Sod it all,' got up, and walked to the door.

‘And where are you going, young man, may I ask?’ said Crabby with her awful leer.

Spadge paused and looked her straight in the eye.

‘If it’s any business of yours’.

We shivered with pleasure at this defiance, Spadge leisurely made for the door.

‘Sit down this instant!’ Crabby suddenly screamed. ‘I won’t have it!’

‘Ta-ta,’ said Spadge.

Then Crabby sprang like a yellow cat, spitting and clawing with rage. She caught Spadge in the doorway and fell upon him. There was a shameful moment of heavy breathing and scuffling, while the teacher tore at his clothes. Spadge caught her hands in his great red fists and held her at arm’s length, struggling.

‘Come and help me, someone!’ wailed Crabby, demented. But nobody moved; we just watched. We saw Spadge lift her up on the top of the cupboard, then walk out of the door and away. There was a moment of silence, then we all laid down our pens and began to stamp on the floor in unison. Crabby stayed where she was, on top of the cupboard, drumming her heels and weeping.

We expected some terrible retribution to follow, but nothing happened at all. Not even the trouble-spark, Spadge was called to account – he was simply left alone. From that day Crabby never spoke to him, or crossed his path, or denied him anything at all. He perched idly in his desk, his knees up to his chin, whistling in a world of his own. Sometimes Miss B would consider him narrowly and if he caught her glance he just winked. Otherwise he was free to come and go, and to take time off as he pleased.

But we never rebelled again; things changed. Crabby B was replaced by anew Head Teacher – a certain Miss Wardly from Birmingham. This lady was something quite new in our lives. She wore sharp glass jewellery which winked as she walked, and she sounded her ‘gees’ like gongs. But she was fond of singing and she was fond of birds, and she encouraged us in the study of both. She was more sober than Crabby, her reigns looser but stronger; and after the first hilarity of her arrival and strangeness, we accepted her proper authority.

Not that she approved very much of me. ‘Fat-and-Lazy’ was the name she called me. After my midday dinner of baked cabbage and bread I would often nod off in my desk. ‘Wake up!’ she would cry, cracking my head with a ruler, ‘you and your little red eyes!’ She also took exception to my steady sniff, which to me came as natural as breathing. ‘Go out into the road and have a good blow, and don’t come back till you are clear.’ But I wouldn’t blow, not for anyone on earth, especially if ordered to do so: so I’d sit out on the wall, indignant and thunderous, and sniff away louder than ever. I wouldn’t budge either, or come back in, till a boy was sent to fetch me up. Miss Wardly would greet me with freezing brightness. ‘A little less beastly now? How about bringing a hanky tomorrow? I’m sure we’d all be grateful.’ I’d sit and scowl, then forget to scowl, and would soon be asleep again…

My brothers, by this time, were all with mw at school. Jack, already the accepted genius, was long past out scope or help. It was agreed that his brains were of such distinction that they absolved him from mortal contacts. So he was left in a corner where his flashes of brilliance kept him twinkling away like a pin-table. Young Tony came last, but he again was different, being impervious either to learning or authority, importing moreover a kind of outrageous cheekiness so inspired that it remained unanswerable. He would sit all day picking holes in blotting paper, his large eyes deep and knowing, his quick tongue scandalous, his wit defiant, his will set against all instruction. There was nothing anyone could do about him, except to yelp at the things he said.

I alone, the drowsy middleman of these two, found it hard to win Miss Wardley's approval. I achieved this in the end by writing long faked essays on the lives and habits of otters. I'd never seen an otter, or even gone to look for one, but the essays took her in. They were read out loud, and even earned me medals, but that's nothing to boast about.

Our village school was poor and crowded, but in the end I relished it. It had a lively reek of steaming life: boys' boots, girls' hair, stoves and sweat, blue ink, white chalk, and shavings. We learned nothing abstract or tenuous there – just simple patterns of facts and letters, portable tricks of calculation, no more than was needed to measure a shed, write out a bill, read a swine-disease warning. Through the dead hours of the morning, through the long afternoons, we chanted away at our tables. Passers-by could hear our rising voices in our bottled-up room on the bank; 'Twelve-inches-one-foot. Three-feet-make-a-yard. Fourteen-pounds-make-a-stone. Eight-stone-a-hundred-weight.' We absorbed these figures as primal truths declared by some ultimate power. Unhearing, unquestioning, we rocked to our chanting, hammering the gold nails home. 'Twice-two-are-four. One-God-is-Love. One-Lord-is-King. One-King-is-George. One-George-is-Fifth…' So it was always, had been, would be for ever, we asked no questions; we didn't hear what we said; yet neither did we ever forget it.

So do I now, through the reiterations of those days, recall that schoolroom which I scarcely noticed – Miss Wardley in glory on her high desk throne, her long throat tinkling with glass. The bubbling stove with its chink of red fire, the old world map as dark as tea; dead field flowers in jars on the windowsills; the cupboard yawning with dog-eared books. Then the boys and the girls, the dwarfs and the cripples; the slow fat ones and the quick bony ones; giants and louts, angels and squinters – Walt Kerry, Bill Timbrell, Spadge Hopkins, Clergy Green, Clarry Hogg, Sam and Sixpence, Poppy and Jo – we were ugly and beautiful, scrofulous, warted, ringwormed, and scabbed at the knees, we were noisy, crude, intolerant, cruel, stupid, and superstitious. But we moved together out of the clutch of the Fates, inhabitors of the world without doom; with a scratching, licking and chewing of pens, a whisper and passing of jokes, a titter of tickling, a grumble of labour, a vague stare at the wall in a dream…

‘Oh, miss, please, miss, can I go round the back?’

An unwilling nod permits me. I stamp out noisily into a swoop of fresh air and a musical surge of birds. All around me now is the free green world, with Mrs. Birt hanging out her washing. I take stock of myself for a moment, alone. I hear the schoolroom’s beehive hum. Of course I don’t really belong to that lot at all; I know I’m something special, a young king perhaps placed secretly here in order to mix with the commoners. There is clearly a mystery about my birth, I feel so unique and majestic. One day, I know, the secret will be told. A coach with footmen will appear suddenly at our cottage, and Mother (my mother?) will weep. The family will stand very solemn and respectful, and I shall drive off to take my throne. I’ll be generous, of course, not proud at all; for my brothers there shall be no dungeons. Rather will I feed them on cakes and jellies, and I’ll provide all my sisters with princes. Sovereign mercy shall be their portion, little though they deserve it. […]

I return to the schoolroom and Miss Wardley scowls (she shall curtsy when I am king). But all this is forgotten when Walt Kerry leans over and demands the results of my sums. ‘Yes, Walt. Of course, Walt. Here, copy them out. They ain’t hard – I done ‘em all.’ He takes them, the bully, as his tributary right, and I’m proud enough to give them. The little Jim Fern, sitting beside me, looks up from his ruined pages. ‘Ain’t you a good scholar! You and your Jack. I wish I was a good scholar like thee.’ He gives me a sad, adoring look, and I begin to feel much better.

Playtime comes and we charge outdoors, releasing our steamed-up cries. Somebody punches a head. Somebody bloodies their knees. Boys cluster together like bees. ‘Let’s go round the back then, shall us, eh?’ To the dark narrow alley, rich with our mysteries, we make our clattering way. Over the wall is the girls’ own place, quite close, and we shout them greetings.

‘I ‘eard you, Bill Timbrell! I ‘eard what you said! You be careful, I’ll tell our teacher!’’ Flushed and refreshed, we stream back to our playground, whistling, indivisibly male. ‘D’you ‘ear what I said then? Did you then, eh? I told ‘em! They ‘alf didn’t squeal!’

We all double up; we can’t speak for laughing, we can’t laugh without hitting each other.

Miss Wardley was patient, but we weren’t very bright. Our books showed a squalor of blots and scratches as though monkeys were being taught to write. We sang in sweet choirs, and drew like cavemen, but most other faculties escaped us. Apart from poetry, of course, which gave no trouble at all. I can remember Miss Wardley, with her squeaking chalk, scrawling the blackboard like a shopping list:

‘Write a poem – which must scan – on one or more of the following: A Kitten. Fairies. My Holidays. An Old Tinker. Charity. Sea Wrack …’ (‘What’s that, miss?’)

But it was easy in those days, one wrote a dozen an hour, one simply didn't hesitate, just began at the beginning and worked steadily through the subjects, ticking them off with indefatigable rhymes.

Sometimes there was a beating, which nobody minded – except an occasional red-faced mother. Sometimes a man came and took out our teeth. ('My mum says you ain't to take out any double-'uns…' '…Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen…' 'Is they all double 'uns?' 'Shut up, you little horror.') Sometimes the Squire would pay us a visit, hand out prizes, and make a misty-eyed speech. Sometimes an Inspector arrived on a bicycle and counted our heads and departed. Meanwhile Miss Wardley moved jingling amongst us, instructing, appealing, despairing.

"You are a grub, Walter Kerry. You have the wits of a hen. You're a great hulking lout of an oaf. You can just stay behind and do it over again. You can all stay behind, the lot of you.'

When lessons grew too tiresome, or too insoluble, we had our traditional ways of avoiding them.

'Please, miss, I got to stay 'ome tomorrow, to 'elp with the washing – the pigs – me dad's sick.'

'I dunno, miss; you never learnt us that.'

'I 'ad me book stole, miss. Carry Burdock pinched it.'

'Please, miss, I got a gurt 'eadache.'

Sometimes these worked, sometimes they didn't. But once, when some tests hung over our heads, a group of us boys evaded them entirely by stinging our hands with horse-flies. The task took all day, but the results were spectacular – our hands swelled like elephants' trunks. ' 'Twas a swarm, please, miss. They set on us. We run, but they stung us awful.' I remember how we groaned, and that we couldn't hold our pens, but I don't remember the pain.

At other times, of course, we forged notes from our mothers, or made ourselves sick with berries, or claimed to be relations of the corpse at funerals (the churchyard lay only next door). It was easy to start wailing when the hearse passed by, 'It's my auntie, miss – it's my cousin Wilf – can I go, miss, please, miss, can I?' Many a lone coffin was followed to its grave by a straggle of long-faced children, pinched, solemn, raggedly dressed, all strangers to the astonished bereaved. […]

The narrow school was just a conveyer belt along which the short years drew us. We entered the door marked 'Infants', moved gradually to the other, and were then handed back to the world. Lucky, lucky point of time, our eyes were on it always. Meanwhile we had moved to grander desks, saw our juniors multiplying in number, Miss Wardley suddenly began to ask our advice and to spoil us as though we were dying. There was no more to be done, no more to be learned. We began to look round the schoolroom with nostalgia and impatience. During playtime in the road we walked about gravely, patronizing the younger creatures. No linger the trembling, white-faced battles, the flights, the buttering-

up of bullies; just a punch here and there to show our authority, then a sober stroll with our peers.

At last Miss Wardley was wringing our hands, tender and deferential. ‘Good-bye, old chaps, and jolly good luck! Don’t forget to come back and see me.’ She gave each of us a coy sad glance. She knew that we never would.

Notes

1. **Georgian** – referring to the eighteenth century.
2. **One up on** – one step above.
3. **Universal education** – although the Elementary Education Act of 1870 accepted the principle of compulsory education, it was by the beginning of the 20-th century that elementary education had become both compulsory and free of charge; public provision of secondary education started in England under the Act of 1902.
4. **Boo-hoo** – sarcastic, not actual, crying is implied by this interjection.
5. **Urgh** – expression of disgust.
6. **You’re ‘alf going to cop it** – you will surely be punished.
7. **‘Ar Farther = Our Father** – beginning of prayer.
8. **Sod it all! = Blast it all**! – used in annoyance and sudden anger.
9. **They ‘alf didn’t squeal** – they were really frightened.
10. **You never learned us that** – **learn** for **teach** is a solecism.
11. **A gurt ‘eadache – awful (terrible, splitting) headache.**

A Bushel of Learning

(From “My Family and Other Animals”, Chapter Four)
Gerald Durrel
(born 1925)

SCARCELY had we settled into the Strawberry-pink Villa before Mother decided that I was running wild, and that it was necessary for me to have some sort of education. But where to find this on a remote Greek island? As usual when a problem arose, the entire family flung itself with enthusiasm into the task of solving it. Each member had his or her own idea of what was best for me, and each argued with such fervour that any discussion about my future generally resulted in an uproar.

'Plenty of time for him to learn,' said Leslie; 'after all, he can read, can't he? I can teach him to shoot, and if we bought a boat I could teach him to sail.'

'But, dear, that wouldn't really be much use to him later on,' Mother pointed out, adding vaguely, 'unless he was going into the Merchant Navy or something.'

'I think it's essential that he learns to dance/ said Margo, 'or else he'll grow up into one of these awful tongue-tied hobbledehoys.'

'Yes, dear; but that sort of thing can come later. He should be getting some sort of grounding in things like mathematics and French... and his spelling's appalling.'

'Literature,' said Larry, with conviction, 'that's what he wants, a good solid grounding in literature. The rest will follow naturally. I've been encouraging him to read some good stuff.'

'But don't you think Rabelais is a little old for him?' asked Mother doubtfully.

'Good, clean fun,' said Larry airily; 'it's important that he gets sex in its right perspective now.'

'You've got a mania about sex,' said Margo primly; 'it doesn't matter what we're discussing, you always have to drag it in.'

'What he wants is a healthy, outdoor life; if he learnt to shoot and sail...' began Leslie.

'Oh, stop talking like a bishop . . . you'll be advocating cold baths next.'

'The trouble with you is you get in one of these damned supercilious moods where you think you know best, and you won't even listen to anyone else's point of view.'

'With a point of view as limited as yours, you can hardly expect me to listen to it.'

'Now, now, there's no sense in fighting,' said Mother.

'Well, Larry's so bloody unreasonable.'

'I like that!' said Larry indignantly; 'I'm far and away the most reasonable member of the family.'

'Yes, dear, but fighting doesn't solve the problem. What we want is someone who can teach Gerry and who'll encourage him in his interests.'

'He appears to have only one interest,' said Larry bitterly, 'and that's this awful urge to fill things with animal life. I don't think he ought to be encouraged in that. Life is fraught with danger as it is. ... I went to light a cigarette only this morning and a damn' great bumble-bee flew out of the box/

'It was a grasshopper with me,' said Leslie gloomily.

'Yes, I think that sort of thing ought to be stopped,' said Margo. 'I found the most revolting jar of wriggling things on the dressing-table, of all places.'

'He doesn't mean any harm, poor little chap,' said Mother pacifically; 'he's so interested in all these things.'

'I wouldn't mind being attacked by bumble-bees, if it led anywhere,' Larry pointed out. 'But it's just a phase ... he'll grow out of it by the time he's fourteen.'

'He's been in this phase from the age of two,' said Mother, 'and he's showing no signs of growing out of it.'

'Well, if you insist on stuffing him full of useless information, I suppose George would have a shot at teaching him,* said Larry.

'That's a brain-wave,' said Mother delightedly. 'Will you go over and see him? I think the sooner he starts the better.'

Sitting under the open window in the twilight, with my arm round Roger's shaggy neck, I had listened with interest, not unmixed with indignation, to the family discussion on my fate. Now it was settled, I wondered vaguely who

George was, and why it was so necessary for me to have lessons. But the dusk was thick with flower-scents, and the olive-groves were dark, mysterious, and fascinating. I forgot about the imminent danger of being educated, and went off with Roger to hunt for glow-worms in the sprawling brambles.

I discovered that George was an old friend of Larry's who had come to Corfu to write. There was nothing very unusual about this, for all Larry's acquaintances in those days were either authors, poets, or painters. It was George, moreover, who was really responsible for our presence in Corfu, for he had written such eulogistic letters about the place that Larry had become convinced we could live nowhere else. Now George was to pay the penalty for his rashness. He came over to the villa to discuss my education with Mother, and we were introduced. We regarded each other with suspicion. George was a very tall and extremely thin man who moved with the odd disjointed grace of a puppet. His lean, skull-like face was partially concealed by a finely pointed brown beard and a pair of large tortoise-shell spectacles. He had a deep, melancholy voice, a dry and sarcastic sense of humour. Having made a joke, he would smile in his beard with a sort of vulpine pleasure which was quite unaffected by anyone else's reactions.

Gravely George set about the task of teaching me. He was undeterred by the fact that there were no school-books available on the island; he simply ransacked his own library and appeared on the appointed day armed with a most unorthodox selection of tomes. Sombrely and patiently he taught me the rudiments of geography from the maps in the back of an ancient copy of Pears Cyclopaedia, English from books that ranged from Wilde to Gibbon, French from a fat and exciting book called Le Petit Larousse, and mathematics from memory. From my point of view, however, the most important thing was that we devoted some of out time to natural history, and George meticulously and carefully taught me how to observe and how to note down observations in a diary. At once my enthusiastic but hap-ha2ard interest in nature became focused, for I found that by writing things down I could learn and remember much more. The only mornings that I was ever on time for my lessons were those which were given up to natural history.

Every morning at nine George would come stalking through the olive-trees, clad in shorts, sandals, and an enormous straw hat with a frayed brim, clutching a wedge of books under one arm, swinging a walking-stick vigorously.

'Good morning. The disciple awaits the master agog with anticipation, I trust?' he would greet me, with a saturnine smile.

In the little dining-room of the villa the shutters would be closed against the sun, and in the green twilight George would loom over the table, methodically arranging the books. Flies, heat-drugged, would crawl slowly on the walls or fly drunkenly about the room, buzzing sleepily. Outside the cicadas were greeting the new days with shrill enthusiasm.

'Let me see, let me see,' George would murmur, running a long forefinger down our carefully prepared time-table; 'yes, yes, mathematics. If I remember rightly, we were involved in the Herculean task of discovering how long it would take six men to build a wall if three of them took a week. I seem to recall that we have spent almost as much time on this problem as the men spent on the wall. Ah, well, let us gird our loins and do battle once again. Perhaps it's the shape of the problem that worries you, eh? Let us see if we can make it more exciting.'

He would droop over the exercise-book pensively, pulling at his beard. Then in his large, clear writing he would set the problem out in a fresh way.

'If it took two caterpillars a week to eat eight leaves, how long would four caterpillars take to eat the same number? Now, apply yourself to that.'

While I struggled with the apparently insoluble problem of the caterpillars' appetites, George would be otherwise occupied. He was an expert fencer, and was at that time engaged in learning some of the local peasant dances, for which he had a passion. So, while waiting for me to finish the sum, he would drift about in the gloom of the room, practising fencing stances or complicated dancing-steps, a habit that I found disconcerting, to say the least, and to which I shall always attribute my inability to do mathematics. Place any simple sum before me, even now, and it immediately conjures up a vision of George's lanky body swaying and jerking round the dimly lit dining-room. He would accompany the dancing sequences with a deep and tuneless humming, like a hive of distraught bees.

'Tum-ti-tum-ti-tum ... tiddle tiddle tumty dee... left leg over... three steps right... tum-ti-tum-ti-tum-ti - dum... back, round, down and up ... tiddle iddle umpty dee . . .,' he would drone, as he paced and pirouetted like a dismal crane. Then, suddenly, the humming would stop, a steely look would creep into his eyes, and he would throw himself into an attitude of defence, pointing an imaginary foil at an imaginary enemy. His eyes narrowed, his spectacles a-glitter, he would drive his adversary back across the room, skilfully avoiding the furniture. When his enemy was backed into the corner, George would dodge and twist round him with the agility of a wasp, stabbing, thrusting, guarding. I could almost see the gleam of steel. Then came the final moment, the upward and outward flick that would catch his opponent's weapon and twist it harmlessly to one side, the swift withdrawal, followed by the long, straight lunge that drove the point of his foil right through the adversary's heart. Through all this I would be watching him, fascinated, the exercise-book lying forgotten in front of me. Mathematics was not one of our more successful subjects.

In geography we made better progress, for George was able to give a more zoological tinge to the lesson. We would draw giant maps, wrinkled with mountains, and then fill in the various places of interest, together with drawings of the more exciting fauna to be found there. Thus for me the chief products of Ceylon were tapirs and tea; of India tigers and rice; of Australia kangaroos and

sheep, while the blue curves of currents we drew across the oceans carried whales, albatross, penguins, and walrus, as well as hurricanes, trade winds, fair weather and foul. Our maps were works of art. The principal volcanoes belched such flames and sparks one feared they would set the paper continents alight; the mountain ranges of the world were so blue and white with ice and snow that it made one chilly to look at them. Our brown, sun-drenched deserts were lumpy with camel-humps and pyramids, and our tropical forests so tangled and luxuriant that it was only with difficulty that the slouching jaguars, lithe snakes, and morose gorillas managed to get through them, while on their outskirts emaciated natives hacked wearily at the painted trees, forming little clearings apparently for the purpose of writing 'coffee' or perhaps 'cereals' across them in unsteady capitals. Our rivers were wide, and blue as forget-me-nots, freckled with canoes and crocodiles. Our oceans were anything but empty, for where they had not frothed themselves into a fury of storms or drawn themselves up into an awe-inspiring tidal wave that hung over some remote, palm-shaggy island, they were full of life. Good-natured whales allowed unseaworthy galleons, armed with a forest of harpoons, to pursue them relentlessly; bland and innocent-looking octopi tenderly engulfed small boats in their arms; Chinese junks, with jaundiced crews, were followed by shoals of well-dentured sharks, while fur-clad Eskimos pursued obese herds of walrus through icefields thickly populated by polar bears and penguins. They were maps that lived, maps that one could study, frown over and add to; maps, in short, that really meant something.

Our attempts at history were not, at first, conspicuously successful, until George discovered that by seasoning a series of unpalatable facts with a sprig of zoology and a sprinkle of completely irrelevant detail, he could get me interested. Thus I became conversant with some historical data which, to the best of my knowledge, have never been recorded before. Breathlessly, history lesson by history lesson, I followed Hannibal's progress over the Alps. His reason for attempting such a feat, and what he intended to do on the other side, were details that scarcely worried me. No, my interest in what I considered to be a very badly planned expedition lay in the fact that I knew the name of each and every elephant. I also knew that Hannibal had appointed a special man not only to feed and look after the elephants, but to give them hot-water bottles when the weather got cold. This interesting fact seems to have escaped most serious historians. Another thing that most history books never seem to mention is that Columbus's first words on setting foot ashore in America were: 'Great heavens, look... a jaguar!' With such an introduction, how could one fail to take an interest in the continent's subsequent history? So George, hampered by inadequate books and a reluctant pupil, would strive to make his teaching interesting, so that the lessons did not drag.

Roger, of course, thought that I was simply wasting my mornings. However, he did not desert me, but lay under the table asleep while I wrestled with my work. Occasionally, if I had to fetch a book, he would wake, get up,

shake himself, yawn loudly, and wag his tail. Then, when he saw me returning to the table, his ears would droop, and he would walk heavily back to his private corner and flop down with a sigh of resignation. George did not mind Roger being in the room, for he behaved himself well, and did not distract my attention. Occasionally, if he was sleeping very heavily and heard a peasant dog barking, Roger would wake up with a start and utter a raucous roar of rage before realizing where he was. Then he would give an embarrassed look at our disapproving faces, his tail would twitch, and he would glance round the room sheepishly.

For a short time Quasimodo also joined us for lessons, and behaved very well as long as he was allowed to sit in my lap. He would drowse there, cooing to himself, the entire morning. It was I who banished him, in fact, for one day he upset a bottle of green ink in the exact centre of a large and very beautiful map that we had just completed. I realized, of course, that this vandalism was not intentional, but even so I was annoyed. Quasimodo tried for a week to get back into favour by sitting outside the door and cooing seductively through the crack, but each time I weakened I would catch a glimpse of his tail-feathers, a bright and horrible green, and harden my heart again.

Achilles also attended one lesson, but he did not approve of being inside the house. He spent the morning wandering about the room and scratching at the skirting-boards and door. Then he kept getting wedged under bits of furniture and scrabbling frantically until we lifted the object and rescued him. The room being small, it meant that in order to move one bit of furniture we had to move practically everything else. After a third upheaval George said that as he had never worked with Carter Paterson and was unused to such exertions he thought Achilles would be happier in the garden.

So there was only Roger left to keep me company. It was comforting, it's true, to be able to rest my feet on his woolly bulk while I grappled with a problem, but even then it was hard to concentrate, for the sun would pour through the shutters, tiger-striping the table and floor, reminding me of all the things I might be doing.

There around me were the vast, empty olive-groves echoing with cicadas; the moss-grown stone walls that made the vineyards into steps where the painted lizards ran; the thickets of myrtle alive with insects, and the rough headland where the flocks of garish goldfinches fluttered with excited piping from thistle-head to thistle-head.

Realizing this, George wisely instituted the novel system of outdoor lessons. Some mornings he arrived, carrying a large furry towel, and together we would make our way down through the olive-groves and along the road that was like a carpet of white velvet under its layer of dust. Then we branched off on to a goat-track that ran along the top of miniature cliffs, until it led us to a bay, secluded and small, with a crescent-shaped fringe of white sand running round it. A grove of stunted olives grew there, providing a pleasant shade. From the

top of the little cliff the water in the bay looked so still and transparent that it was hard to believe there was any at all. Fishes seemed to drift over the wave-wrinkled sand as though suspended in mid-air; while through six feet of clear water you could see rocks on which anemones lifted frail, coloured arms, and hermit crabs moved, dragging their top-shaped homes.

We would strip beneath the olives and walk out into the warm, bright water, to drift, face down, over the rocks and clumps of seaweed, occasionally diving to bring up something that caught our eye: a shell more brightly coloured than the rest; or a hermit crab of massive proportions, wearing an anemone on his shell, like a bonnet with a pink flower on it. Here and there on the sandy bottom grew rib-shaped beds of black ribbon-weed, and it was among these beds that the sea-slugs lived. Treading water and peering down, we could see below the shining, narrow fronds of green and black weeds growing close and tangled, over which we hung like hawks suspended in air above a strange woodland. In the clearing among the weed-bed lay the sea-slugs, perhaps the ugliest of the sea fauna. Some six inches long, they looked exactly like overgrown sausages made out of thick, brown, carunculated leather; dim, primitive beasts that just lie in one spot, rolling gently with the sea's swing, sucking in sea-water at one end of their bodies and passing it out at the other. The minute vegetable and animal life in the water is filtered off somewhere inside the sausage, and passed to the simple mechanism of the sea-slug's stomach. No one could say that the sea-slugs led interesting lives. Dully they rolled on the sand, sucking in the sea with monotonous regularity. It was hard to believe that these obese creatures could defend themselves in any way, or that they would ever need to, but in fact they had an unusual method of showing their displeasure. Pick them up out of the water, and they would squirt a jet of sea-water out of either end of their bodies, apparently without any muscular effort. It was this water-pistol habit of theirs that led us to invent a game. Each armed with a sea-slug we would make our weapons squirt, noting how and where the water struck the sea. Then we moved over to that spot, and the one who discovered the greatest amount of sea fauna in his area won a point. Occasionally, as in any game, feeling would run high, indignant accusations of cheating would be made and denied. It was then we found our sea-slugs useful for turning on our opponent. Whenever we had made use of the sea-slugs' services we always swam out and returned them to their forest of weed. Next time we came down they would still be there, probably in exactly the same position as we had left them, rolling quietly to and fro.

Having exhausted the possibilities of the slugs, we would hunt for new shells for my collection, or hold long discussions on the other fauna we had found; George would suddenly realize that all this, though most enjoyable, could hardly be described as education in the strictest sense of the word, so we would drift back to the shallows and lie there. The lesson then proceeded, while the shoals of little fish would gather about us and nibble gently at our legs.

'So the French and British Fleets were slowly drawing together for what was to be the decisive sea battle of the war. When the enemy was sighted, Nelson was on the bridge bird-watching through his telescope... he had already been warned of the Frenchmen's approach by a friendly gull. .. eh ?... oh, a greater black-backed gull I think it was... well the ships manoeuvred round each other ... of course they couldn't move so fast in those days, for they did everything by sail... no engines... no, not even outboard engines.... The British sailors were a bit worried because the French seemed so strong, but when they saw that Nelson was so little affected by the whole thing that he was sitting on the bridge labelling his birds'-egg collection, they decided that there was really nothing to be scared about '

The sea was like a warm, silky coverlet that moved my body gently to and fro. There were no waves, only this gentle underwater movement, the pulse of the sea, rocking me softly. Around my legs the coloured fish nicked and trembled, and stood on their heads while they mumbled at me with toothless gums. In the drooping clusters of olives a cicada whispered gently to itself.

'... and so they carried Nelson down below as quickly as possible, so that none of the crew would know he had been hit. . . . He was mortally wounded, and lying below decks with the battle still raging above, he murmured his last words: "Kiss me, Hardy," and then he died.... What? Oh yes. Well, he had already told Hardy that if anything happened to him he could have his birds' eggs ... so, though England had lost her finest seaman, the battle had been won, and it had far-reaching effects in Europe....'

Across the mouth of the bay a sun-bleached boat would pass, rowed by a brown fisherman in tattered trousers, standing in the stern and twisting an oar in the water like a fish's tail. He would raise one hand in lazy salute, and across the still, blue water you could hear the plaintive squeak of the oar as it twisted, and the soft clop

Notes

1. **the entire family** — Mother, two elder brothers and a sister.
2. **Rabelais, Francois** (1494(?) — 1553) — French humanist and author.
3. **Roger** — here, dog's name.
4. **Corfu** — one of the Ionian Islands of Greece, 227 square miles in area, lying in the Ionian Sea off the northwestern mainland coast.
5. ***Pears Cyclopaedia***—encyclopaedia called so after the editor's name.
6. **Wilde, Oscar** (1854—1900) — Irish poet and dramatist.
7. **Gibbon, Edward** (1737—1794) — English historian; author of Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.
8. **Le Petit Larousse** — Fr. full title, Nouveau Petit Larousse Illuslre. An illustrated ancyclopaedic dictionary published in France every year since 1906. Named after Pierre Athanase Larousse (1817—1875), French lexicographer, encyclopaedist, educator.
9. **the Herculean task** — Hercules won immortality by performing the 12 labours demanded by Hera.
10. **octopi** — pl. of octopus (usual form, octopuses).

11. **Hannibal** — Carthaginian general (247—183 B. C.).
12. **Columbus, Christopher** (1451—1506) —Italian navigator in the service of Spain; opened the New World to exploration.
13. **Quasimodo** — here, name of a pigeon.
14. **Achilles** —here, name of a tortoise.
15. **the decisive sea battle** — the Battle of Trafalgar 1805 in which Nelson defeated the French and Spanish fleets" and in which he died.

The Idealist

Frank O'Connor (Michael O'Donovan)
(1903-1966)

I don't know how it is about education but it never seemed to do anything for me but get me into trouble.

Adventure stories weren't so bad, but as a kid I was very serious and preferred realism to romance. School stories were what I liked best, and, judged by our standards, these were romantic enough for anyone. The schools were English, so I suppose you couldn't expect anything else. They were always called "the venerable pile", and there was usually a ghost in them; they were built in a square that was called "the quad", and, according to the pictures, they were all clock-towers, spires and pinnacles, like the lunatic asylum with us. The fellows in the stories were all good climbers, and got in and out of school at night on ropes made of knotted sheets. They dressed queerly; they wore long trousers, short, black jackets, and top hats. Whenever they did anything wrong they were given "lines" in Latin. When it was a bad case, they were flogged and never shown any sign of pain; only the bad fellows, and they always said: "Ow! Ow!"

Most of them were grand chaps who always stuck together and were great at football and cricket. They never told lies and wouldn't talk to anyone who did. If they were caught out and asked a point-blank question, they always told the truth, unless someone else was with them, and then even if they were to be expelled for it they wouldn't give his name, even if he was a thief, which, as a matter of fact, he frequently was. It was surprising in such good schools, with fathers who never gave less than five quid, the number of thieves there were. The fellows in our school hardly ever stole, though they only got a penny a week, and sometimes not even that, as when their fathers were on the booze and their mothers had to go to the pawn.

I worked hard at the football and cricket, though of course we never had a proper football and the cricket we played was with a hurly stick against a wicket chalked on some wall. The officers in the barrack played proper cricket, and on summer evenings I used to go and watch them, like one of the souls in Purgatory watching the joys of Paradise.

Even so, I couldn't help being disgusted at the bad way things were run in our school. Our "venerable pile" was a red brick building without tower or

pinnacle a fellow could climb, and no ghost at all; we had no team, so a fellow, no matter how hard he worked, could never play for the school, and, instead of giving you “lines”, Latin or any other sort, Murderer Moloney either lifted you by the ears or bashed you with a cane. When he got tired of bashing you on the hands he bashed you on the legs.

But these were only superficial things. What was really wrong was ourselves. The fellows sucked up to the masters and told them all that went on. If they were caught out in anything they tried to put the blame on someone else, even if it meant telling lies. When they were caned they sniveled and said it wasn’t fair; drew back their hands as if they were terrified, so that the cane caught only the tips fingers, and then screamed and stood on one leg, shaking out their fingers in the hope of getting it counted as one. Finally they roared that their wrist was broken and crawled back to their desks with their hands squeezed under their armpits, howling. I mean you couldn’t help feeling ashamed, imagining what chaps from a decent school would think if they saw it.

My own way to school led me past the barrack gate. In those peaceful days sentries never minded you going past the guard-room to have a look at the chaps drilling in the barrack square; if you came at dinner-time they even called you in and gave you plum duff and tea. Naturally, with such temptations I was often late. The only excuse, short of a letter from your mother, was to say you were at early Mass. The Murderer would never know whether you were or not, and if he did anything to you you could easily get him into trouble with the parish priest. Even as kids we knew who the real boss of the school was.

But after I started reading those confounded school stories I was never happy about saying I had been to Mass. It was a lie, and I knew that the chaps in the stories would have died sooner that tell it. They were all round me like invisible presences, and I hated to do anything which I felt they might disapprove of.

One morning I came in very late and rather frightened. “What kept you till this hour, Delaney?” Murderer Moloney asked, looking at the clock.

I wanted to say I had been at Mass, but I couldn’t. The invisible presences were all about me.

“I was delayed at the barrack, sir,” I replied in panic.

There was a faint titter from the class, and Moloney raised his brows in mild surprise. He was a big powerful man with fair hair and blue eyes and a manner that at times was deceptively mild.

“Oh, indeed,” he said, politely enough. “And what delayed you?”

“I was watching the soldiers drilling, sir,” I said.

The class tittered again. This was a new line entirely for them.

“Oh,” Moloney said casually, “I never knew you were such a military man. Hold out your hand!”

Compared with the laughter the slaps were nothing, and besides, I had the example of the invisible presences to sustain me. I did not flinch. I returned to

my desk slowly and quietly without snivelling or squeezing my hands, and the Murderer looked after me, raising his brows again as though to indicate that this was a new line for him, too. But the others gaped and whispered as if I were some strange animal. At playtime they gathered about me, full of curiosity and excitement.

"Delaney, why did you say that about the barrack?"

"Because 'twas true," I replied firmly. "I wasn't going to tell him a lie."

"What lie?"

"That I was at Mass."

'Then couldn't you say you had to go on a message?"

"That would be a lie too."

"Cripes, Delaney," they said, "you'd better mind yourself. The Murderer is in an awful wax. He'll massacre you."

I knew that. I knew only too well that the Murderer's professional pride had been deeply wounded, and foe the rest of the day I was on my best behaviour. But my best wasn't enough, for I underrated the Murderer's guile. Though he pretended to be reading, he was watching me the whole time.

"Delaney," he said at last without raising his head from the book, "was that you talking?"

"'Twas, sir," I replied in consternation.

The whole class laughed. They couldn't believe but that I was deliberately trailing my coat, and, of course, the laugh must have convinced him that I was. I suppose if people do tell you lies all day, it soon becomes a sort of perquisite which you resent being deprived of.

"Oh," he said, throwing down his book, "we'll soon stop that."

This time it was a tougher job, because he was really on his mettle. But so was I. I knew this was the testing point for me, and if only I could keep my head I should provide a model for the whole class. When I had got through the ordeal without moving a muscle, and returned to my desk with my hands by my sides, the invisible presences gave me a great clap. But the visible ones were nearly as annoyed as the Murderer himself. After school half a dozen of them followed me down the school yard.

"Go on!" they shouted truculently. "Shaping as usual!"

"I was not shaping."

"You were shaping. You are always showing off. Trying to pretend he didn't hurt you – a blooming crybaby like you!"

"I wasn't trying to pretend," I shouted, even then resisting the temptation to nurse my bruised hands. "Only decent fellows don't cry over every little pain like kids."

"Go on!" they bawled after me. "You ould idiot!" And, as I went down the school lane, still trying to keep what the stories called "a stiff upper lip', and consoling myself with the thought that my torment was over until next morning, I heard their mocking voices after me.

“Loony Larry! Yah, Loony Larry!”

I realized that if I was to keep on terms with the invisible presences I should have to watch my step at school.

So I did, all through that year. But one day an awful thing happened. I was coming in from the yard, and in the porch outside our schoolroom I saw a fellow called Gorman taking something from a coat on the rack. I always described Gorman to myself as “the black sheep of the school”. He was a fellow I disliked and feared, a handsome, sulky, spoiled, and sneering lout. I paid no attention to him because I had escaped for a few moments into my dream world in which fathers never gave less than fivers and the honour op the school was always saved by some quiet, unassuming fellow like myself – “a dark horse”, as the stories called him.

“Who are you looking at?” Gorman asked threateningly.

“I wasn’t looking at any one,” I replied with an indignant start.

“I was only getting a pencil out of my coat,” he added, clenching his fists.

“Nobody said you weren’t,” I replied, thinking that this was a very queer subject to start a row about.

“You’d better not, either,” he snarled. “You can mind your own business.”

“You mind yours!” I retorted, purely for the purpose of saving face. “I never spoke to you at all.”

And that, so far as I was concerned, was the end of it.

But after playtime the Murderer, looking exceptionally serious, stood before the class, balancing a pencil in both hands.

“Everyone who left the classroom this morning, stand out!” he called. Then he lowered his head and looked at us from under his brows. “Mind now, I said everyone!”

I stood out with the others, including Gorman. We were all very puzzled.

“Did you take anything from a coat on the rack this morning?” the Murderer asked, laying a heavy, hairy paw on Gorman’s shoulder and staring menacingly into his eyes.

“Me, sir?” Gorman exclaimed innocently. “No, sir.”

“Did you see anyone else doing it?”

“No, sir.”

“You?” he asked another lad, but even before he reached me at all I realized why Gorman had told the lie and wondered frantically what I should do.

“You?” he asked me, and his big red face was close to mine, his blue eyes were only a few inches away, and the smell of his toilet soap was in my nostrils. My panic made me say the wrong thing as though I had planned it.

“I didn’t take anything, sir,” I said in a low voice.

“Did you see someone else do it?” he asked raising his brows and showing quite plainly that he had noticed my evasion. “Have you a tongue in your head?” he shouted suddenly, and the whole class, electrified, stared at me. “You?” he added curtly to the next boy as though he had lost interest in me.

"No, sir."

"Back to your desks, the rest of you!" he ordered. "Delaney, you stay here."

He waited till everyone was seated again before going on.

"Turn out your pockets."

I did, and a half-stifled giggle rose, which the Murderer quelled with a thunderous glance. Even for a small boy I had pockets that were museums in themselves; the purpose of half the things I had brought to light I couldn't have explained myself. They were antiques, prehistoric and unlabelled. Among them was a school story borrowed the previous evening from a queer fellow who chewed paper as if it were gum. The Murderer reached out for it, and holding it at arm's length, shook it out with an expression of deepening disgust as he noticed the nibbled corners and margins.

"Oh," he said disdainfully, "so this is how you waste your time! What do you do with this rubbish – eat it?"

"Tisn't mine, sir," I said against the laugh that sprang up. "I borrowed it."

"Is that what you did with the money?" he asked quickly, his fat head on one side.

"Money?" I repeated in confusion. "What money?"

"The shilling that was stolen from Flanagan's overcoat this morning."

(Flanagan was a little hunchback whose people coddled him; no one else in the school would have possessed that much money.)

"I never took Flanagan's shilling,' I said, beginning to cry, "and you have no right to say I did."

"I have the right to say you are the most impudent and defiant puppy in the school," he replied, his voice hoarse with rage, "and I wouldn't put it past you. What else can anyone expect and you reading this dirty, rotten filthy rubbish?" And he tore my school story in halves and flung them to the furthest corner of the classroom. "Dirty, filthy, English rubbish! Now, hold out your hand."

This time the invisible presences deserted me. Hearing themselves described in these contemptuous terms, they fled. The Murderer went mad in the way people do whenever they are up against something they don't understand. Even the other fellows were shocked, and, heaven knows, they had little sympathy with me.

"You should put the police on him," they advised me later in the playground. "He lifted the cane over his shoulder. He could get the goal for that."

"But why didn't you say you didn't see anyone?" asked the eldest, a fellow called Spillane.

"Because I did," I said, beginning to sob all over again at the memory of my wrongs. "I saw Gorman."

"Gorman?" Spillane echoed incredulously. "Was it Gorman took Flanagan's money? And why didn't you say so?"

"Because it wouldn't be right," I sobbed.

“Why wouldn’t it be right?”

“Because Gorman should have told the truth himself,” I said. “And if this was a proper school he’d be sent to Coventry.”

“He’d be sent where?”

“Coventry. No one would ever speak to him again.”

“But why would Gorman tell the truth if he took the money?” Spillane asked as you’d speak to a baby. “Jay, Delaney,” he added pityingly, “you’re getting madder and madder. Now look at what you’re after bringing on yourself!”

Suddenly Gorman came lumbering up, red and angry.

“Delaney,” he shouted threateningly, “did you say I took Flanagan’s money?”

Gorman, though I of course didn’t realize it, was as much at sea as Moloney and the rest. Seeing me take all that punishment rather than give him away, he concluded that I must be more afraid of him than of Moloney, and that the proper thing to do was to make me more so. He couldn’t have come at a time when I cared less for him. I didn’t even bother to reply but lashed out with all my strength at his brutal face. This was the last thing he expected. He screamed, and his hand came away from his face, all blood. Then he threw off his satchel and came at me, but at the same moment a door opened behind us and a lame teacher called Murphy emerged. We all ran like mad and the fight was forgotten.

It didn’t remain forgotten, though. Next morning after prayers the Murderer scowled at me.

“Delaney, were you fighting in the yard after school yesterday?”

For a second or two I didn’t reply. I couldn’t help feeling that it wasn’t worth it. But before the invisible presences fled forever, I made another effort.

“I was, sir,” I said, and this time there wasn’t even a titter. I was out of my mind. The whole class knew it and was awe-stricken.

“Who were you fighting?”

“I’d sooner not say, sir,” I replied, hysteria beginning to well up in me. It was all very well for the invisible presences, but they hadn’t to deal with the Murderer.

“Who was he fighting with?” he asked lightly, resting his hands on the desk and studying the ceiling.

“Gorman, sir,” replied three or four voices – as easy as that!

“Did Gorman hit him first?”

“No, sir. He hit Gorman first.”

“Stand out,” he said, taking up the cane. “Now,” he added, going up to Gorman, “you take this and hit him. And make sure you hit him hard,” he went on, giving Gorman’s arm an encouraging squeeze. “He thinks he is a great fellow. You show him now what we think of him.”

Gorman came towards me with a broad grin. He thought it a great joke. The class thought it a great joke. They began to roar with laughter. Even the Murderer permitted himself a modest grin at his own cleverness.

"Hold out your hand," he said to me.

I didn't. I began to feel trapped and a little crazy.

"Hold out your hand, I say," he shouted, beginning to lose his temper.

"I will not," I shouted back, losing all control of myself.

"You what?" he cried incredulously, dashing at me round the classroom with his hand raised as though to strike me. "What's that you said, you dirty little thief?"

"I'm not a thief, I'm not a thief," I screamed. "And if he comes near me I'll kick the shins off him. You have no right to give him that cane, and you have no right to call me a thief either. If you do it again, I'll go down to the police and then we'll see who the thief is."

"You refused to answer my questions," he roared, and if I had been in my right mind I should have known he had suddenly taken fright; probably the word "police" had frightened him.

"No," I said through my sobs, "and I won't answer them now either. I'm not a spy."

"Oh," he retorted with a sarcastic sniff, "so that's what you call a spy, Mr. Delaney?"

"Yes, and that's what they all are, all the fellows here – dirty spies! – but I'm not going to be a spy for you. You can do your own spying."

"That's enough now, that's enough!" he said, his fat hand almost beseechingly. "There's no need to lose control of yourself, my dear young fellow, and there's no need whatever to screech like that. 'Tis most unmanly. Go back to your seat now and I'll talk to you another time."

I obeyed, but I did no work. No one else did much either. The hysteria had spread to the class. I alternated between fits of exultation at my own successful defiance of the Murderer and panic at the prospect of his revenge; and at each change of mood I put my face in my hands and sobbed again. The Murderer even did not order me to stop. He didn't so much as look at me.

After that I was the hero of the school for the whole afternoon.

Gorman tried to resume the fight, but Spillane ordered him away contemptuously – a fellow who had taken the master's cane to another had no status. But that wasn't the sort of hero I wanted to be. I preferred something less sensational.

Next morning I was in such a state of panic that I did not know how I should face school at all. I dawdled, between two minds as to whether or not I should mitch. The silence of the school lane and yard awed me. I had made myself late as well.

"What kept you, Delaney?" the Murderer asked quietly.

I knew it was no good.

"I was at Mass, sir."

"All right. Take your seat."

He seemed a bit surprised. What I had not realized was the incidental advantage of our system over the English one. By this time half a dozen of his pets had brought the Murderer the true story of Flanagan's shilling, and if he didn't feel a monster he probably felt a fool.

But by that time I didn't care. In my school sack I had another story. Not a school story this time, though. School stories were a washout: "Bang! Bang!" – that was the only way to deal with men like the Murderer.

Notes:

1. **The quad** – *coll*. Abbreviation of **quadrangle**
2. **With us** – *here,* in Ireland
3. **They dressed queerly** – school uniforms are obligatory in public schools and other private educational establishments; uniforms vary from one school to another, especially in the colour of the school jacket and the shape of the hat
4. **Peaceful days** – before the First World War (1914 – 1918) and also before 1919 – 1021, another period of strong Irish opposition to British colonialists.
5. **Early Mass** – Mass at 7 a.m.
6. **Playtime** – recess of 20 minutes between classes, with each class having this break separately from the rest of the school
7. **Cripes** – *vulgar* for Christ = My Goodness!
8. **Wax** – *slang* for fit of anger
9. **Trailing my coat** – *here*, teasing or provoking
10. **He was really on his mettle** – he was roused to do his best
11. **Shaping** – here, showing off, boasting
12. **Ould** = old
13. **To keep a stiff upper lip** – means to show the firmness of character (by not complaining when in pain or trouble).
14. **To be on terms** – *here*, be friendly
15. **The black sheep** – a good-for-nothing person
16. **Fivers** – five-pound notes
17. **A dark horse** – *fig.* person whose capabilities may be greater than they are known to be
18. **He lifted the cane over his shoulder** – this implies that the teacher can be prosecuted for cruelty
19. **Jay** – *slang* for a newcomer or an inexperienced person
20. **Kick the shins off him** – put him in his place
21. **Mitch** – *coll*. skip classes

The Academy

David Ely
(born 1927)

The Academy lay in the center of a valley, its red-brick buildings arranged in a square. Beyond the surrounding athletic and drill fields were thick woods that rose gradually on all sides, forming a shield of privacy that made the

Academy seem in fact to be, in the words of a school brochure, “a little world of its own”.

Mr. Holston parked his car in the area marked for visitors. Before proceeding toward the administration building, he paused to watch several groups of uniformed cadets marching to and fro on one of the fields. There was an atmosphere of regularity and tradition that he found quite pleasing. The buildings were old and solid, their bricks weathered to a pale hue, and the stone steps worn down by generations of cadets. The concrete walkways were scrubbed clean and bordered by grass meticulously clipped and weeded. Even the trees of the forest stood in formation.

In front of the administration building was the statue of an elderly man in military dress, one hand resting benignly on the stone shoulder of a young cadet, the other arm extended in a pointing gesture. Mr. Holston supposed this might represent the Academy’s founder, perhaps a retired Civil War general, but the legend inscribed on the base was so faded that he could not read it. The symbolism of the man and boy was conventional, of course – the firm but kindly teacher indicating the horizon of manhood to his youthful charge – although Mr. Holston noted that the figures were facing so that the stone commander was pointing toward the school, rather than in the direction of the outside world, which would have been more appropriate.

In the lobby of the administration building, Mr. Holston gave his name to the cadet at the reception desk, and was at once ushered down a hallway to the Director’s office.

The office was as spare and neat as everything else Mr. Holston had observed about the Academy. It contained a filing cabinet, a single chair for visitors, and a desk behind which the Director himself was in the process of rising.

The Director was a strongly built man whose gray uniform was closely cut in military fashion, and his handshake was vigorous. He wore the grey uniform of the school with a single star on each shoulder to denote his rank.

“Well, Mr. Holston,” he said, after the customary exchange of amenities, “I’ve studied your boy’s transcript and test records, and I’ve discussed them with the Admission Committee, and without beating around the bush, sir, we’re prepared to look favorably on a formal application, if you care to make one.”

“I see,” said Mr. Holston, who had not expected such an immediate response. “That’s very encouraging to hear.” Feeling slightly ill at ease under the Director’s gaze, he glanced around at the walls, which, however, were absolutely bare.

“So,” continued the Director, “the only question that remains is whether you want your son to be enrolled here. I’m assuming there’s no special financial problem involved, naturally.”

“Oh, no. We have that all worked out.” Mr. Holston hesitated, thinking that such an important matter should not be disposed of so simply. “I would like to

ask about one thing," he said. "Your catalog mentioned a policy of not having any home visits the first year."

The Director nodded. "Yes. Well, we've worked out our system over a long period of time, and we've found that home visits just don't fit into the picture until the cadet is thoroughly oriented to our way of doing things. We say 'a year' merely as a general guide. Sometimes it's longer than that. Parents can visit here, of course, at special times." The Director gazed inquiringly at Mr. Holston, who tried to think of some more questions, but could not. "Actually," the Director continued, "the cadets seem to prefer it this way, once they get started. What we're looking for, Mr. Holston, is to motivate them – motivate them to achieve success, which means success in becoming a fully oriented member of this community, and you can see how home visits might cause a little disruption in the process."

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Holston.

"Well," said the Director. "You'll want to see a little more of the Academy before making up your mind, I should imagine. Classroom, dormitories, and so forth."

"If it isn't too much trouble."

"No trouble at all." The Director rose and escorted Mr. Holston out to the hall. "Nothing special about our classrooms," the Director remarked, stopping at one of the doors. He opened it. The instructor, a grey-haired man, roared *"Attention"* and the entire class leaped up smartly, as the instructor did a left-face and saluted the Director.

"At ease, Grimes," said the Director, returning the salute. "Proceed with instruction."

"Very good, sir."

The Director closed the door again, so that Mr. Holston had only a glimpse of the class – a roomful of gray uniformed figures, heads so closely cropped that they were almost shaven, with nothing much to distinguish one cadet from the next.

"Those were big fellows," remarked Mr. Holston, as they continued along the hallway. "I suppose they're your seniors."

"We don't go by the usual class designations, Mr. Holston. Each cadet is paced according to his needs and capacities. Our purpose is to build men, sir, and you simply can't find a formula to satisfy the requirements of every case. Now here," said the Director pushing open a pair of swinging doors, "is our cafeteria, which is staffed by the cadets themselves. Part of our community work program."

It was the middle of the afternoon, and the cafeteria was empty, except for a few men who were mopping the floor and scrubbing the serving counters. They, too, snapped to attention when the visitors appeared, until the Director motioned for them to continue their work, as he escorted Mr. Holston on into the kitchen, where several male cooks were busy preparing food for the evening meal.

"At ease," the Director called out, for the cooks, too, had come to attention. "All modern equipment, Mr. Holston, as you can see," he said indicating the gleaming ranges, the sinks and the neat rows of cleavers, knives, and other implements hanging on the white walls. "You will understand," he added, "that we can't run a military establishment in a sloppy fashion. We try to be thorough, sir. We have, as I say, a little world here, and it's a world that happens to be organized along military lines." He turned to an elderly cook. "Looks good, Carson."

"Thank you, sir," Carson saluted

Mr. Holston and the Director left the kitchen by the rear door, passing into the square, formed by the Academy buildings. "I suppose," said Mr. Holston, "that you can find a lot of employees who like the military way. Old Army men, say."

The Director was busy returning the salute of an instructor who was marching a platoon of cadets nearby. He stood silently watching the ranks pass by. "Drill," he declared finally. "Sometimes I think it's the greatest lesson of all. When a boy knows drill, Mr. Holston, then he knows something about life, don't you think?"

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Holston, a bit uncertainly. "Of course, it's a splendid training, especially when a boy goes on to have a career in the service."

"Not only there, sir, if you'll permit me. Drill has important values in civilian pursuits as well, in my opinion. And I don't mean only physical drill," the Director added, as he and his guest walked on. "We use drill techniques in classroom work, to instill habits of mental discipline and personal courtesy. We've been given hopeless cases, Mr. Holston, but we've managed in every single one, sir, to find the right answer. And the key to it has been drill, whether on the parade ground or in the classroom. Of course," he said, ushering Mr. Holston into the next building, "in some instances it takes more time than in others, and I don't mean to imply that the Academy deals primarily with so-called problem boys. Not at all. The great majority are like your own son – good, decent young fellows from fine upstanding homes." He opened a door. "This is one of our dormitories, Mr. Holston."

The room ran the length of the building. The wall was lined with beds spaced out to accommodate lockers, chairs and desks. The few cadets who were then studying in the room sprang from their chairs.

"Maybe you'd like to chat with one of the boys," the Director said to Mr. Holston, after he had put the cadets at ease. "Here," he said, as they approached the nearest student, who was taller than either of the men, "it's Cadet Sloan, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, this is Mr. Holston, Sloan, and he'll have a few words with you," said the Director, who then moved off along the row of beds, inspecting the blanket corners and testing here and there for dust.

Mr. Holston, left with Cadet Sloan, did not know quite what to say.

"Well," he began, "how do you like it here?"

"I like it very well, sir."

"That's good. Um, the food and everything… you find it right?"

"Everything is very good, sir."

"Ah," said Mr. Holston, rubbing his hands together, trying to think of additional questions while Cadet Sloan gazed at him with polite attention. "Well, I suppose you're planning on some college or other, aren't you?"

"My plans aren't too definite at present, sir."

"Yes, yes. I can see you're a hard worker on your books, Mr. Sloan," Mr. Holston continued, glancing first at the stacks of texts on the desk and then at Cadet Sloan's face, which wore a studious look that was reinforced by little wrinkles of concentration around the eyes and mouth.

"We have plenty to do, sir, that's right."

"Your parents must be proud to have such a hard-working son."

"My parents aren't living, sir."

"Oh – I'm sorry." Mr. Holston regretted his blunder. No wonder Sloan looked so drawn.

"That's all right, sir. It's been quite a while."

"Ah, yes. Well." Mr. Holston could not help being struck by the manly demeanor of Cadet Sloan. He put out his hand. Nice to talk with you, son," he said. "And good luck."

"Thank you, sir."

The Director and his friend walked back toward the administration building. On all sides, Mr. Holston was aware of organized and purposeful activity. Several groups of cadets were marching along the paths on their way from one building to another; a soccer game was in progress on a field nearby, and on the main parade ground, a full company in dress uniform was executing a complex series of drill maneuvers.

"It's all very impressive," said Mr. Holston.

The Director smiled. "We try to keep our young men busy."

"That cadet I talked to back there," Mr. Holston added. "Sloan. He seemed to be a remarkably mature person."

"We strive to build a sense of maturity, Mr. Holston."

"I can certainly tell that." Mr. Holston of saw that they were approaching the strong figure of teacher and student which were turned the wrong way. He gestured toward the statues.

"That's quite a piece of sculpture."

"Thank you. We're very proud of it."

Mr. Holston could not repress his curiosity. "It does seem a little – well, unconventional. I mean the positioning. You know, facing toward the Academy instead of away from it."

The Director nodded. "Yes, most visitors notice that, Mr. Holston. At first glance, it does seem to be mistaken, I agree." He paused beside the figures and gazed approvingly up at the stern features of the teacher. Mr. Holston thought he saw a resemblance between the director and the statue which, he reflected further, might be no mere fancy, for the operation of the Academy could very well be a family mater, with the leadership being passed on from one generation to the next.

"For us, you see," said the Director, continuing with the explanation, "The important thing is the Academy. This is our world, Mr. Holston. All that a boy needs is to be found right here. So that the symbolism of the figures, sir, is to represent a welcome to this little world – rather than the more conventional theme of farewell which would be indicated if the man were pointing away from the Academy."

Of course," said Mr. Holston.

They returned to the Director's office where an elderly man in green fatigues was polishing the desk and chairs. He stopped as they entered and stood stiffly near the wall.

"At ease, Morgan," said the Director. "That'll be all."

"Very good, sir." The elderly man saluted and hobbled out.

The Director seated himself behind the desk and briefly inspected its top for signs of dust. "Well, Mr. Holston," he said, "now you've seen something of the Academy, and I'm sure you've had an opportunity to consider a little further the question of whether it may be what you're looking for, to help your boy."

"Yes, yes. Of course." Mr. Holston nodded. "You have a fine institution here, I must say. Everything seems to be organized with…real efficiency." He glanced toward the door beyond which he thought he could still hear the shuffling steps of the elderly man in fatigues. "It's a real example of what the military method can achieve," he added, feeling that perhaps he had not sufficiently expressed his admiration for all that the Director had shown him.

The Director took a folder from a drawer and placed it on the desk.

"As for my son," said Mr. Holston, "that's the important question, of course. Whether this world would be the right place for him. Or rather," he amended, "whether he would be right for you. I'm sure there are many instances where boys simply don't fit in."

The Director smiled. "We don't believe in failure here, Mr. Holston. When we agree to admit a boy, sir, that means that we are laying our reputation on the line. He opened the folder and took out a letter. "And without intending to boast, Mr. Holston, I think I can truthfully say that we have yet to concede defeat." He pushed the letter across the desk. Mr. Holston saw that it was an official note of acceptance, complete except for his signature as parent. He felt in his pocket for his fountain pen.

"In some cases, naturally," the Director continued, "we need to have more patience than in others. But patience is built into our system."

“Patience, yes,” said Mr. Holston. He laid his pen beside the letter of acceptance. “Boys need patience. You’re right there, of course. Some boys need a lot of that, I agree.” He moved the letter slightly, so that it was squared off with the edge of the desk. “He’s not a bad boy, though. Not at all,” he added.

“Mr. Holston, in my experience there is no such thing as a bad boy.”

“I mean, he’s gotten into a couple of little scrapes – that’s in the records, of course – but nothing really…” Mr. Holston cleared his throat.

“Boys will be boys, sir. Lack of proper motivation leads to trouble, even in the best of families. You have nothing to be ashamed of, sir.”

“Oh, we’re not ashamed. We just feel – my wife and I – we feel that we would be better off in the kind of atmosphere you provide here, especially during the, um, difficult years.”

“That’s what we’re here for, Mr. Holston,” said the Director.

“I mean it’s not as though we were trying to avoid our own responsibilities as parents – “

“Far from it, sir,” agreed the Director.

“- but in certain situations it seems advisable to, um …”

“To place a boy in congenial surroundings under the proper form of supervision,” said the Director; helpfully completing Mr. Holston’s thought. “You’re absolutely right, sir. Believe me, I deal with parents every day of the year, and I know all of the things that pass through their minds.” He clasped his hands together and smiled at his visitor.

“Some people think it’s a kind of rejection of the child. I mean, getting rid of him – “

“Oh, I’ve heard plenty of that, Mr. Holston. It’s all this modern psychiatric stuff. Guilt feelings!” The Director gave a short laugh and shook his head. “I tell you, when a father and mother are prepared to undergo heavy financial sacrifice in order to see their boy receive a decent chance in life – well, if that’s getting rid of him, then it’s a pretty conscientious way of doing it!”

“Yes, yes,” said Mr. Holston quickly. They smiled at each other. In the brief pause that followed, Mr. Holston heard the commands of the drill instructors faintly in the distance, and the muffled beat of the marching cadets. There was marching in the hallway, too, and he supposed that it was a class, moving in formation from one room to another.

“Perhaps you have some further questions,” the Director remarked.

Mr. Holston picked up his pen. “Oh, not at all. No, I think you’ve covered everything.” He tested the point of the pen against his thumb, to be sure it was working.

“This is the time for questions, Mr. Holston,” the Director continued. “It’s better to ask them now, I mean to say, while the Academy is fresh in your mind. Sometimes it’s hard for a parent to remember later on the things he wanted to ask.”

“Oh, yes, I can understand that,” said Mr. Holston, studying the letter before him.

“For example, you might like to know more about our cooperative work program for the cadets. The cafeteria was an instance of that.”

“It was a very fine cafeteria,” said Mr. Holston. “No, I don’t really have any questions about it.”

“Then there’s the academic program. Perhaps you feel insufficiently informed on that subject.”

“No, the catalog was quite complete. I really can’t think of anything it didn’t cover.”

“We are great believers in the value of learning by teaching. Let me explain that. The cadets take turns, you see, in the instruction program – “

“Quite so,” said Mr. Holston. “I’m sure it’s remarkably effective feature of your system.”

“Oh, it is indeed. That classroom that you saw, for example – “

“Really, I have no questions,” said Mr. Holston. He signed his name in the proper place, put his pen in his pocket, and pushed the letter back across the desk.

“Thank you,” said the Director, placing the letter carefully in the folder. “Actually, few parents do have questions.” He smiled at Mr. Holston who, however, was glancing at his watch and pushing back his chair. “They seem to sense right away whether the Academy is what they really want for their boys. Like yourself, sir, if I am not mistaken.”

“Absolutely,” said Mr. Holston. He stood up and touched his face with his handkerchief, for the air in the room seemed close.

The Director rose and shook his hand. “Of course, the very best guarantee of satisfaction for the parent is to see the experienced cadet and have a chance to chat with him. As you did with Sloan, I believe.”

“Yes, Sloan,” Mr. Holston went to the door. “I can find any way out, sir. Don’t you bother.”

“No bother at all, Mr. Holston,” said the Director, accompanying his visitor along the hallway. “Sloan - yes, a fine cadet, Sloan. He’s been with us for quite a while now. Let’s see – “

“Goodbye, sir,” said Mr. Holston, as they reached the front entrance.

“- it must be nearly…”

But Mr. Holston did not stay to hear. He went quickly down the worn stone steps, passed by the statues of the man and the boy without looking up at them, and hastened to his car. On his way out, he drove by a group of cadets in sweat shirts resting by the road after a session of calisthenics. They got quickly to their feet at the command of their instructor, but Mr. Holston concentrated on his driving, and although it seemed to him that several of the cadets were bald and that others were quite gray, he gave then only a glance, and thought no more about it.

Notes

1. **Civil War** — in the United States, the war between the Union (the North) and the Confederacy (the South) from 1861 to 1865.
2. **a single star** — denotes a one-star general, the rank immediately above colonel; there are five types of generals in the US Army, with the highest rank having an insignia of five stars.
3. **transcript** — here, a student's school record.
4. **instructor** — in special establishments all teachers are called instructors, while in secondary schools the term applies to someone who teaches a particular skill, often connected with sport.
5. **Attention!**. — military command: standing with legs together, arms at sides, chest up and eyes forward.
6. **did a left-face** — here, turned to the left, sharply and smartly.
7. **At ease** — military command: standing with legs slightly apart, hands held behind back.
8. **Proceed with instruction** — formal style == You may continue your class as before.
9. **Very good, sir.** — formal 'reply to a command: I understand, and all will be done (as per your instructions).
10. **a platoon** — military term, a body of soldiers, about 60 in number, acting as a unit.
11. **a soccer game** — colloq. for Association football (as contrasted with Rugby football). Association football is played with a spherical leather ball; each of the two teams consists of eleven players; the general object of the game is to propel the ball into the opponents' goal, using the feet, the head, or the body, but not the hands or arms; only the goalkeeper may use his hands; the normal length of a game is two periods of 45 minutes each. Rugby football is played with an oval ball between two teams of fifteen players; the object is to win points by scoring "tries" or goals; the ball may be kicked, dribbled, carried, or passed from hand to hand; the game consists of two periods of not more than 40 minutes each, with an interval for half-time.
12. **fatigues** — army clothes designated or permitted for work and field duty.
13. **That'll be all.** — formal permission to go=: I finished here with you — you can go back to your work (or studies).
14. **we are laying our reputation on the line** = we are risking our good reputation.
15. **heavy financial sacrifice** — it means $ 5,000 per year in the 1970s.
16. **academic program** — as opposed to practical program and military drill; the academic subjects are, for example, mathematics, science, languages, literature, history and geography; the practical subjects are drawing and painting, handicraft, singing, physical education, etc.
17. **sweat shirt** — T-shirt, short-sleeved, close-fitting, collarless, usually cotton shirt worn informally.

Simple Arithmetic

Virginia Moriconi
(born 1925)

- *Geneva, January 15*

Dear Father:

Well, I am back in School, as you can see, and the place is just as miserable as ever. My only friend, the one I talked to you about, Ronald Fletcher, is not coming back any more because someone persuaded his mother that she was letting him go to waste, since he was extremely photogenic, so now

he is going to become a child actor. I was very surprised to hear this, as the one thing Ronnie liked to do was play basketball. He was very shy.

The flight wasn't too bad. I mean nobody had to be carried off the plane. The only thing was, we were six hours late and they forgot to give us anything to eat, so for fourteen hours we had a chance to get quite hungry but, as you say, for the money you save going tourist class, you should be prepared to make a few little sacrifices.

I did what you told me, and when we got to Idlewild I paid the taxi driver his fare and gave him a fifty-cent tip. He was very dissatisfied. In fact he wouldn't give me my suitcase. In fact I don't know what would have happened if a man hadn't come up just while the argument was going on and when he heard what it was all about he gave the taxi driver a dollar and I took my suitcase and got to the plane on time.

During the trip I thought the whole thing over. I did not come to any conclusion. I know I have been very extravagant and unreasonable about money and you have done the best you can to explain this to me. Still, while I was thinking about it, it seemed to me that there were only three possibilities. I could just have given up and let the taxi driver have the suitcase, but when you realize that if we had to buy everything over again that was in the suitcase we would probably have had to spend at least five hundred dollars, it does not seem very economical. Or I could have gone on arguing with him and missed the plane, but then we would have had to pay something like three hundred dollars for another ticket. Or else I could have given him an extra twenty-five cents which, as you say, is just throwing money around to create an impression. What would you have done?

Anyway I got here, with the suitcase, which was the main thing. They took two week-end privileges away from me because I was late for the opening of School. I tried to explain to M. Frisch that it had nothing to do with me if the weather was so bad that the plane was delayed for six hours, but he said that prudent persons allow for continjensies of this kind and make earlier reservations. I don't care about this because the next two week-ends are skiing week-ends and I have never seen any point in waking up at six o'clock in the morning just to get frozen stiff and endure terrible pain even if sports are a part of growing up, as you say. Besides, we will save twenty-seven dollars by having me stay in my room.

In closing I want to say that I had a very nice Christmas and I apreciate everything you tried to do for me and I hope I wasn't too much of a bother. (Martha explained to me that you had had to take time off from your honeymoon in order to make Christmas for me and I am very sorry even though I do not think I am to blame if Christmas falls on the twenty-fifth of December, especially since everybody knows that it does. What I mean is, if you had wanted to have a long honeymoon you and Martha could have gotten married

earlier, or you could have waited until Christmas was over, or you could just have told me not to come and I would have understood.)

I will try not to spend so much money in the future and I will keep accounts and send them to you. I will also try to remember to do the eye exercises and the exercises for fallen arches that the doctors in New York prescribed.

Love,
Stephen

New York, January 19

Dear Stephen:

Thank you very much for the long letter of January fifteenth. I was very glad to know that you had gotten back safely, even though the flight was late. (I do not agree with M. Frisch that prudent persons allow for "continjensies" of this kind, now that air travel is as standard as it is, and the service usually so good, but we must remember that Swiss people are, by and large, the most meticulous in the world and nothing offends them more than other people who are not punctual.)

In the affair of the suitcase, I'm afraid that we were both at fault. I had forgotten that there would be an extra charge for luggage when I suggested that you should tip the driver fifty cents. You, on the other hand, might have inferred from his argument that he was simply asking that the tariff—i.e. the fare, plus the overcharge for the suitcase—should be paid in full, and regulated yourself accordingly. In any event you arrived, and I am only sorry that obviously you had no time to learn the name and address of your benefactor so that we might have paid him back for his kindness.

I will look forward to going over your accounting and I am sure you will find that in keeping a clear record of what you spend you will be able to cut your cloth according to the bolt and that, in turn, will help you to develop a real regard for yourself. It is a common failing, as I told you, to spend too much money in order to compensate oneself for a lack of inner security, but you can easily see that a foolish purchase does not insure stability, and if you are chronically insolvent you can hardly hope for peace of mind. Your allowance is more than adequate and when you learn to make both ends meet you will have taken a decisive step ahead. I have great faith in you and I know you will find your anchor to windward in your studies, in your sports, and in your companions.

As to what you say about Christmas, you are not obliged to "apreciate" what we did for you. The important thing was that you should have had a good time, and I think we had some wonderful fun together, the three of us, don't you? Until your mother decides where she wants to live and settles down, this is your home and you must always think of it that way. Even though I have remarried, I am still your father, first and last, and Martha is very fond of you too, and very

understanding about your problems. You may not be aware of it but in fact she is one of the best friends you have. New ideas and new stepmothers take a little getting used to, of course.

Please write me as regularly as you can, since your letters mean a great deal to me. Please try too, at all times, to keep your marks up to scratch, as college entrance is getting harder and harder in this country, and there are thousands of candidates each year for the good universities. Concentrate particularly on spelling. "Contingency" is difficult, I know, but there is no excuse for only one "p" in "appreciate"! And do the exercises.

Love,
Father.

Geneva, January 22

Dear Mummy:

Last Sunday I had to write to Father to thank him for my Christmas vacation and to tell him that I got back all right. This Sunday I thought I would write to you even though you are on a cruze so perhaps you will never get my letter. I must say that if they didn't make us write home once a week I don't believe that I would ever write any letters at all. What I mean is that once you get to a point like this, in a place like this, you see that you are supposed to have your life and your parents are supposed to have their lives, and you have lost the connection.

Anyway I have to tell you that Father was wonderful to me and Martha was very nice too. They had thought it all out, what a child of my age might like to do in his vacation and sometimes it was pretty strenuous, as you can imagine. At the end the School sent the bill for the first term, where they charge you for the extras which they let you have here and it seems that I had gone way over my allowance and besides I had signed for a whole lot of things I did not deserve. So there was a terrible scene and Father was very angry and Martha cried and said that if Father always made such an effort to consider me as a person I should make an effort to consider him as a person too and wake up to the fact that he was not Rockefeller and that even if he was sacrificing himself so that I could go to one of the most expensive schools in the world it did not mean that I should drag everybody down in the mud by my reckless spending. So now I have to turn over a new leaf and keep accounts of every penny and not buy anything which is out of proportion to our scale of living.

Except for that one time they were very affectionate to me and did everything they could for my happiness. Of course it was awful without you. It was the first time we hadn't been together and I couldn't really believe it was Christmas.

I hope you are having a wonderful time and getting the rest you need and please write me when you can. All my love, Stephen.

Geneva, January 29

Dear Father:

Well, it is your turn for the letter this week because I wrote to Mummy last Sunday. (I was sure I can say this to you without hurting your feelings because you always said that the one thing you and Mummy wanted was a civilized divorce so we could all be friends.) Anyway Mummy hasn't answered my letter so probably she doesn't approve of my spelling any more than you do. I am beginning to wonder if maybe it wouldn't be much simpler and much cheaper too if I didn't go to college after all. I really don't know what this education is for in the first place.

There is a terrible scandal here at School which has been very interesting for the rest of us. One of the girls, who is really sixteen, has gotten pregnant and everyone knows that it is all on account of the science instructer, who is a drip. We are waiting to see if he will marry her, but in the meantime she is terrifically upset and she has been expelled from the School. She is going away on Friday.

I always liked her very much and I had a long talk with her last night. I wanted to tell her that maybe it was not the end of the world, that my stepmother was going to have a baby in May, although she never got married until December, and the sky didn't fall in or anything. I thought it might have comforted her to think that grown-ups make the same mistakes that children do (if you can call her a child) but then I was afraid that it might be disloyal to drag you Martha into the conversation, so I just let it go.

I'm fine and things are just the same. Love, Stephen.

New York, February 2

Dear Stephen:

It would be a great relief to think that your mother did not 'aprove' of your spelling either, but I'm sure that it's not for that reason that you haven't heard from her. She was never any good as a correspondent, and now it is probably more difficult for her than ever. We did indeed try for what you call a 'civilized divorce' for all the sakes, but divorce is not an easy thing for any of the persons involved, as you well know, and if you try to put yourself in your mother's place for a moment, you will see that she is in need of time and solitude to work things out for herself. She will certainly write to you as soon as she has found herself again, and meanwhile you must continue to believe in her affection for you and not let impatience get the better of you.

Again, in case you are really in doubt about it, the purpose of your education is to enable to stand on your own feet when you are a man and make something of yourself. Inaccuracies in spelling will not simplify anything.

I can easily see how you might have made a parallel between your friend who has gotten into trouble, and Martha who is expecting the baby in May, but there is only a superficial similarity in the two cases.

Your friend is, or was, still a child, and would have done better to have accepted the limitations of the world of children – as you can clearly see for yourself, now that she is in this predicament. Martha, on the other hand, was hardly a child. She was a mature human being, responsible for her own actions and prepared to be responsible for the baby when it came. Moreover, I, unlike the science 'instructer' am not a drip, I too am responsible for my actions, and so Martha and I are married and I will do my best to live up to her and the baby.

Speaking of which, we have just found a new apartment because this one will be too small for us in May. It is right across the street from your old school and we have a kitchen, a dining alcove, a living room, two bedrooms – one for me and Martha, and one for the new baby – and another room which will be for you. Martha felt that it was very important for you to feel that you had a place of your own when you came home to us, and so it is largely thanks to her that we have taken such a big place. The room will double as a study for me when you are not with us, but we will move all my books and papers and paraphernalia whenever you come, and Martha is planning to hang the Japanese silk screen you liked at the foot of the bed.

Please keep in touch, and please don't forget the exercises,

Love, Father.

Geneva, February 5

Dear Father:

There is one thing which I would like to say to you which is that if it hadn't been for you I would never have heard of a 'civilized divorce', but it is the way you explained it to me. I always thought it was crazy. What I mean is, wouldn't it have been better if you had said, 'I don't like your mother any more and I would rather live with Martha,' instead of insisting that you and Mummy were always going to be the greatest friends? Because the way things are now Mummy probably thinks that you still like her very much, and it must be hard for Martha to believe that she was chosen, and I'm pretty much confused myself, although it is really none of my business.

You will be sorry to hear that I am not able to do any of the exercises any longer. I cannot do the eye exercises because my roommate got so fascinated by the stereo gadget that he broke it. (But the School Nurse says she thinks it may be just as well to let the whole thing go since in her opinion there was a good chance that I might have gotten more cross-eyed than ever, fidgeting with the viewer.) And I cannot do the exercises for fallen arches, at least for one foot, because when I was decorating the Assembly Hall for the dance last Sunday, I fell off the stepladder and broke my ankle. So now I am in the Infirmary and the School wants to know whether to send the doctor's bill to you or to Mummy, because they had to call in a specialist from outside, since the regular School Doctor only knows how to do a very limited number of things. So I have cost a lot of money again and I am very sorry, but if they were half-way decent in this

School they would pay to have proper equipment and not let the students risk their lives on broken stepladders, which is something you could write to the Book-Keeping Department, if you felt like it, because I can't, but you could, and it might do some good in the end.

The girl who got into so much trouble took too many sleeping pills and died. I felt terrible about it, in fact I cried when I heard it. Life is very crewel, isn't it?

I agree with what you said, that she was a child, but I think she knew that, from her point of view. I think she did what she did because she thought of the science instructer as a grown-up, so she imagined that she was perfectly safe with him. You may think she was just bad, because she was a child and should have known better, but I think that it was not entirely her fault since here at School we are all encouraged to take the teachers seriously.

I am very glad you have found a new apartment and I hope you won't move all your books and papers when I come home, because that would only make me feel that I was more of a nuisance than ever. Love, Stephen.

New York. February 8

Dear Stephen:

This will have to be a very short letter because we are to move into the new apartment tomorrow and Martha needs my help with the packing.

We were exceedingly shocked by the tragic death of your friend, and very sorry that you should have had such a sad experience. Life can be 'crewel' indeed to the people who do not learn how to live it.

When I was exactly your age I broke my ankle too – I wasn't on a defective stepladder, I was playing hockey – and it hurt like the devil. I still remember it and you have all my sympathy. (I have written to the School Physician to ask how long you will have to be immobilized, and to urge him to get you back into the athletic programme as fast as possible. The specialist's bill should be sent to me.)

I have also ordered another stereo viewer because, in spite of the opinion of the School Nurse, the exercises are most important and you are to do them *religiously.* Please be more careful with this one no matterhow much it may 'fassinate' your roommate.

Martha sends love and wants to know what you would like for your birthday. Let us know how the ankle is mending.

Love, Father.

Geneva, February 12

Dear Father:

I was very surprised by your letter. I was surprised that you said you were helping Martha to pack because when you and Mummy were married I do not ever remember you packing or anything like that so I guess Martha is reforming

your character. I was also surprised by what you said about the girl who died. What I mean is, if anyone told me a story like that I think I would have just let myself get a little worked up about the science instructer because it seems to me that he was a villan too. Of course you are much more reserved than I am.

I am out of the Infirmary and they have given me a pair of crutches, but I am afraid it will be a long time before I can do sports again.

I hope the new apartment is nice and I do not want anything for my birthday because it will seem very funny having a birthday in School so I would rather not be reminded of it. Love, Stephen.

New York, February 15

Dear Stephen:

This is not an answer to your letter of February twelfth, but an attempt to have a serious discussion with you, as if we were face to face.

You are almost fifteen years old. Shortly you will be up against the stiffest competition of your life when you apply for college entrance. No examiner is going to find himself favourably impressed by 'character' or 'instructer' or 'vilan' or 'riserved' or similar errors. You will have to face the fact that in this world we succeed on our merits, and if we are unsuccessful, on account of sloppy habits of mind, we suffer for it. You are still too young to understand me entirely, but you are not too young to recognize the importance of effort. People who do not make the grade are desperately unhappy all their lives because they have no place in society.

If you do not pass the college entrance examinations simply because you are unable to spell, it will be nobody's fault but your own, and you will be gravely handicapped for the rest of your life.

Every time you are in doubt about a word you are to look it up in the dictionary and memorize the spelling. This is the least you can do to help yourself.

We are still at sixes and sevens in the new apartment but when Martha accomplishes all she has planned it should be very nice indeed and I think you will like it.

Love, Father.

Geneva, February 19

Dear Father:

I guess we do not understand each other at all. If you immagine for one minute that just by making a little effort I could imaggine how to spell immaggine without looking it up and finding that actually it is 'imagine', then you are all wrong. In other words, if you get a letter from me and there are only two or three mistakes well you just have to take my word for it that I have had to look up practically every single word in the dictionary and that is one reason I hate having to write you these letters because they take so long and in the end

they are not at all spontainious, no, just wait a second, here it is, 'spontaneous', and believe me only two or three mistakes in a letter from me is one of the seven wonders of the world. What I'm saying is that I am doing the best I can as you would aggree if you could see my dictionary which is falling apart and when you say I should memmorize the spelling I can't because it doesn't make any sence to me and never did. Love, Stephen.

New York, February 23, 2012

Dear Stephen:

It is probably just as well that you have gotten everything off your chest. We all need to blow up once in a while. It clears the air.

Please don't ever forget that I am aware that spelling is difficult for you. I know you are making a great effort and I am very proud of you. I just want to be sure that you keep trying.

I am enclosing a small cheque for your birthday because even if you do not want to be reminded of it I wouldn't want to forget it and you must know that we are thinking of you. Love, Father.

Geneva, February 26

We are not allowed to cash personal cheques here in the School, but thank you anyway for the money.

I am not able to write any more because we are going to have the exams and I have to study.

Love, Stephen.

New York, March 2

Night Letter

Best of luck, stop, keep me posted exam results – love,

Father.

Geneva, March 12

Dear Father:

Well, the exams are over, I got a C in English because apparently I do not know how to spell, which should not come as too much of a surprise to you. In Science, Mathematics, and Latin I got A, and in French and History I got a B plus. This makes me first in the class, which doesn't mean very much since none of the children here have any life of the mind, as you would say. I mean they are all jerks, more or less. What am I supposed to do in the Easter vacation? Do you want me to come to New York, or shall I just stay here and get a rest, which I could use? Love, Stephen.

New York, March 16

Dear Stephen:

I am immensely pleased with the examination results. Congratulations. Pull up the spelling and our worries are over.

Just yesterday I had a letter from your mother. She has taken a little house in Majorca, which is an island off the Spanish coast, as you probably know, and she suggests that you should come to her for the Easter holidays. Of course you are always welcome here – and you could rest as much as you wanted – but Majorca is very beautiful and would certainly appeal to the artistic side of your nature. I have written to your mother, urging her to write to you immediately, and I enclose her address in case you should want to write yourself. Let me know what you would like to do.

Love, Father.

Geneva, March 19

Dear Mummy:

Father says that you have invited me to come to you in Majorca for the Easter vacation. Is that true? I would be very happy if it were. It has been very hard to be away from you for all this time and if you wanted to see me it would mean a great deal to me. I mean if you are feeling well enough. I could do a lot of things for you so you would not get too tired.

I wonder if you will think that I have changed when you see me. As a matter of fact I have changed a lot because I have become quite bitter. I have become quite bitter on account of this School.

I know that you and Father wanted me to have some experience of what the world was like outside of America but what you didn't know is that Geneva is not the world at all. I mean, if you were born here then perhaps you would have a real life, but I do not know anyone who was born here so all the people I see are just like myself, we are just waiting not to be lost any more. I think it would have been better to have left me in some place where I belonged even if Americans are getting very loud and money conscious. Because actually most children here are Americans, if you come right down to it, only it seems their parents didn't know what to do with them any longer.

Mummy, I have written all this because I'm afraid that I have spent too much money all over again and M. Frisch says that Father will have a crise des nerfs when he sees what I have done, and I thought that maybe you would understand that I only bought these things because there didn't seem to be anything else to do, and that you could help me somehow or other. Anyway, according to the School, we will have to pay for all these things.

- Concert, Segovia (Worth it) 16.00 (Swiss Francs)
- School Dance 5.00
- English Drama (What do they mean?) 10.00
- Controle de I'habitant (?) 9.10

- Co-op purchases 65.90
- Ballets Russes (Disappointing) 47.00
- Librairie Prior 59.30
- Concert piano (For practising) 61.00
- Teinturie (They ruined everything) 56.50
- Toilet, and Medicine 35.00
- Escalade Ball 7.00
- Pocket Money 160.00
- 77 Yoghurts (Doctor's Advice) 42.40
- Book account 295.70

Total: 869.00 (Swiss Francs)

Now you see the trouble is that Father told me I was to spend about fifty dollars a month, because that was my allowance, and that I was not to spend anything more. Anyway, fifty dollars a month would be about two hundred and ten Swiss Francs, and then I had fifteen dollars for Christmas from Granny, and when I got back to School I found four Francs in the pocket of my leather jacket and then I had seventy-nine cents over from New York, but that doesn't help much, and then Father sent me twenty-five dollars for my birthday but I couldn't cash the cheque because they do not allow that here in School, so what shall I do?

It is a serious situation as you can see, and it is going to get a lot more serious when Father sees the bill. But whatever you do, I imploar you not to write to Father because the trouble seems to be that I never had a balance foreward and I am afraid that it is impossible to keep accounts without a balance foreward, and even more afraid that by this time the accounts have gone a little bizerk.

Do you want me to take a plane when I come to Majorca? Who shall I say is going to pay for the ticket?

Please do write me as soon as you can, because the holidays begin on March 30 and if you don't tell me what to do I will be way out on a lim. Lots and lots of love, Stephen.

Geneva, March 26

Dear Father:

I wrote to Mummy a week ago to say that I would like very much to spend my Easter vacation in Majorca. So far she hasn't answered my letter, but I guess she will pretty soon. I hope she will because the holidays begin on Thursday.

I am afraid you are going to be upset about the bill all over again, but in the spring term I will start anew and keep you in touch with what is going on. Love, Stephen.

P.S. If Mummy doesn't write what shall I do?

Notes

1. **Idlewild** — New York International Airport, opened in 1948.
2. **a fifty-cent tip** — the tip to the taxi driver should be 15% of the fare.
3. **priviliges** = privileges; spelling mistakes in the boy's letters are nearly always discussed in the father's replies.
4. **M.** — Fr. abbrev. Monsieur, Mr.; used here to denote the teacher's nationality.
5. **continjensies** = contingencies.
6. **apreciate** == appreciate.
7. **bolt** — a large roll of cloth.
8. **find your anchor to windward** — do your best.
9. **up to scratch** — up to standard.
10. **this country** — here, the USA; generally, the speaker's. country.
11. **cruze** = cruise
12. **vacation** — in American schools, vacations are 2 days following Thanksgiving Day (last Thursday in November), one to two weeks after Christmas Day (December 25th), one week at the end of February (winter vacation), one week around the 1st of April (spring vacation), two days preceding Easter, and summer vacation from mid-June to September.
13. **aprove** = approve.
14. **much cheaper** — in the '70s, students of American State universities paid tuition fees of $ 1,000—3,000 per year, while in private colleges and universities education cost "S 5,000—10,000 per year, with a tendency to rise.
15. **instructer** == instructor.
16. **a drip** — slang a weak or dull person.
17. **a dining alcove** is always by the window (usually a bay window), either in the kitchen or in the living room.
18. **fassinated** == fascinated.
19. **crewel** = cruel.
20. **athletic programme** is non-obligatory, as opposed to physical education (P. E.).
21. **character** = character.
22. **villan** = villain.
23. **riserved** == reserved.
24. **make the grade** — finish schooling successfully.
25. **at sixes and sevens** — in confusion.
26. **the seven wonders of the world** — seven monuments of the ancient world that appeared on various lists of late antiquity; most commonly they are the Colossus of Rhodes, the Pharos at Alexandria, the Hanging Gardens (and walls) of Babylon, the temple of Artemis at Ephesus, the Egyptian pyramids, the tomb of Mausolus at Halicarnassus, and the statue of Zeus at Olympia.
27. **aggree** = agree.
28. **memmorize** = memorize.
29. **sence** = sense.
30. **Night Letter** — a cheaper kind of telegram sent at a reduction as the message is not sent immediately but is postponed until the lines are less busy, which is usually at night.
31. **A, B plus** — there are several marking systems. One involves using a 10-point scale, sometimes even a 20-point one. Then there is marking in percentages, with marks generally ranging from 85% to about 25%. In this case marking is in grades; grades go from A, the highest, down to D, or sometimes E, as follows:
    - A, A- B+, B, B- C+, C, C- D, (E).

They are read as: A, A minus, B plus, and so on. Sometimes Greek letters are used (alpha, beta, etc.). Grades are widely used in the senior forms of schools, and nearly always in universities and colleges.

32. **jerk** — slang a stupid or insignificant person.
33. **Easter vacation** — in some schools, the vacation of two days before Easter is followed by another week off.
34. **crise des nerfs** — Fr. nervous breakdown.
35. **Segovia, Andres** (b. 1893) —Spanish classical guitarist.
36. **Controle de l'habitant** — Fr, looking after the boarders (in the school).
37. **Co-op purchases** — here, things bought in the school for studies, such as notebooks, pencils, etc.
38. **Ballets Russes** — Fr. here classical ballet performances.
39. **Librairie Prior** —Fr. here, library for senior pupils.
40. **Teinturie** — corrupted Fr. here, having some clothes dyed.
41. **Escalade Ball** — corrupted Fr. here, a school party.
42. **imploar** == implore.
43. **bizerk** — here, crazy.
44. **way out on a lim** = way out on a limb, be in a very difficult position.
45. **spring term** — at school, the second term (with the first term called the winter term).

The Rocket

Ray Bradbury
(born 1920)

Many nights Fiorello Bodoni would awaken to hear the rockets sighing in the dark sky. He would tiptoe from bed, certain that his kind wife was dreaming, to let himself out into the night air. For a few moments he would be free of the smells of old food in the small house by the river. For a silent moment he would let his heart soar alone into space, following the rockets.

Now, this very night, he stood half naked in the darkness, watching the fire fountains murmuring in the air. The rockets on their long wild way to Mars and Saturn and Venus!

"Well, well, Bodoni."

Bodoni started.

On a milk crate, by the silent river, sat an old man who also watched the rockets through the midnight hush.

"Oh, it's you, Bramante!"

"Do you come out every night, Bodoni?"

"Only for the air."

"So? I prefer the rockets myself," said old Bramante. "I was a boy when they started. Eighty years ago, and I've never been on one yet."

"I will ride up in one someday," said Bodoni.

"Fool!" cried Bramante. "You'll never go. This is a rich man's world." He shook his gray head, remembering. "When I was young they wrote it in fiery letters: THE WORLD OF THE FUTURE! Science, Comfort, and New Things

for All! Ha! Eighty years. The Future becomes Now! Do we fly rockets'? No! We live in shacks like our ancestors before us."

"Perhaps my *sons* -" said Bodoni.

"No, nor *their* sons!" the old man shouted. "It's the rich who have dreams and rockets!"

Bodoni hesitated. "Old man, I've saved three thousand dollars. It took me six years to save it. For my business, to invest in machinery. But every night for a month now I've been awake. I hear the rockets. I think. And tonight I've made up my mind. One of us will fly to Mars!" His eyes were shining and dark.

"Idiot," snapped Bramante. "How will you choose? Who will go? If you go, your wife will hate you, for you will be just a bit nearer God, in spare. When you tell your amazing trip to her, over the years, won't bitterness gnaw at her?"

"No, no!"

"Yes! And your children? Will their lives be filled with the memory of Papa, who flew to Mars while they stayed here? What a senseless task you will set your boys. They will think of the rocket all their lives. They will lie awake. They will be sick with wanting it. Just as you are sick now. They will want to die if they cannot go. Don't set that goal, I warn you. Let them be content with being poor. Turn their eyes down to their hands and to your junk yard, not up to the stars."

"But -"

"Suppose your wife went? How would you feel, knowing she had *seen* and you had not? She would become holy. You would think of throwing her in the river. No, Bodoni, buy a new wrecking machine, which you need, and pull your dreams apart with it, and smash them to pieces."

The old man subsided, gazing at the river in which, drowned, images of rockets burned down the sky.

"Good night," said Bodoni.

"Sleep well," said the other.

When the toast jumped from its silver box, Bodoni almost screamed. The night had been sleepless. Among his nervous children, beside his mountainous wife, Bodoni had twisted and stared at nothing. Bramante was right. Better to invest the money. Why save it when only one of the family could ride the rocket, while the others remained to melt in frustration?

"Fiorello, eat your toast," said his wife, Maria.

"My throat is shriveled," said Bodoni.

The children rushed in, the three boys fighting over a toy rocket, the two girls carrying dolls which duplicated the inhabitants of Mars, Venus, and Neptune, green mannequins with three yellow eyes and twelve fingers.

"I saw the Venus rocket!" cried Paolo.

"It took off, whoosh!" hissed Antonello.

"Children!" shouted Bodoni, hands to his ears.

They stared at him. He seldom shouted.

Bodoni arose. "Listen, all of you," he said. "I have enough money to take one of us on the Mars rocket."

Everyone yelled.

"You understand?" he asked. "Only *one* of us. Who?"

"Me, me, me!" cried the children.

"You," said Maria.

"You," said Bodoni to her.

They all fell silent.

The children reconsidered. "Let Lorenzo go - he's oldest."

"Let Miriamne go - she's a girl!"

"Think what you would see," said Bodoni's wife to him. But her eyes were strange. Her voice shook. "The meteors, like fish. The universe. The Moon. Someone should go who could tell it well on returning. You have a way with words."

"Nonsense. So have you," he objected.

Everyone trembled.

"Here," said Bodoni unhappily. From a broom he broke straws of various lengths. "The short straw wins." He held out his tight fist. "Choose."

Solemnly each took his turn.

"Long straw."

"Long straw."

Another.

"Long straw."

The children finished. The room was quiet. Two straws remained. Bodoni felt his heart ache in him.

"Now," he whispered. "Maria."

She drew.

"The short straw," she said.

"Ah," sighed Lorenzo, half happy, half sad. "Mama goes to Mars."

Bodoni tried to smile. "Congratulations. I will buy your ticket today."

"Wait, Fiorello -"

"You can leave next week," he murmured.

She saw the sad eyes of her children upon her, with the smiles beneath their straight, large noses. She returned the straw slowly to her husband. "I cannot go to Mars."

"But why not?"

"I will be busy with another child."

"What!"

She would not look at him. "It wouldn't do for me to travel in my condition."

He took her elbow. "Is this the truth?"

"Draw again. Start over."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" he said incredulously.

"I didn't remember."

"Maria, Maria," he whispered, patting her face. He turned to the children. "Draw again."

Paolo immediately drew the short straw.

"I go to Mars!" He danced wildly. "Thank you, Father!"

The other children edged away. "That's swell, Paolo."

Paolo stopped smiling to examine his parents and his brothers and sisters. "I *can* go, can't I?" he asked uncertainly.

"Yes."

"And you'll *like* me when I come back?"

"Of course."

Paolo studied the precious broomstraw on his trembling hand and shook his head. He threw it away. "I forgot. School starts. I can't go. Draw again."

But none would draw. A full sadness lay on them.

"None of us will go," said Lorenzo.

"That's best," said Maria.

"Bramante was right," said Bodoni.

With his breakfast curdled within him, Fiorello Bodoni worked in his junk yard, ripping metal, melting it, pouring out usable ingots. His equipment flaked apart; competition had kept him on the insane edge of poverty for twenty years. It was a very bad morning.

In the afternoon a man entered the junk yard and called up to Bodoni on his wrecking machine. "Hey, Bodoni, I got some metal for you!"

"What is it, Mr. Mathews?" asked Bodoni, listlessly.

"A rocket ship. What's wrong? Don't you want it?"

"Yes, yes!" He seized the man's arm, and stopped, bewildered.

"Of course," said Mathews, "it's only a mockup. *You* know. When they plan a rocket they build a full-scale model first, of aluminum. You might make a small profit boiling her down. Let you have her for two thousand -"

Bodoni dropped his hand. "I haven't the money."

"Sorry. Thought I'd help you. Last time we talked you said how everyone outbid you on junk. Thought I'd slip this to you on the q.t. Well -"

"I need new equipment. I saved money for that."

"I understand."

"If I bought your rocket, I wouldn't even be able to melt it down. My aluminum furnace broke down last week -"

"Sure."

"I couldn't possibly use the rocket if I bought it from you."

"I know."

Bodoni hunked and shut his eyes. He opened them and looked at Mr. Mathews. "But I am a great fool. I will take my money from the bank and give it to you."

"But if you can't melt the rocket down -"

"Deliver it," said Bodoni.

"All right, if you say so. Tonight?"

"Tonight," said Bodoni, "would be fine. Yes, I would like to have a rocket ship tonight."

There was a moon. The rocket was white and big in the junk yard. It held the whiteness of the moon and the blueness of the stars. Bodoni looked at it and loved all of it. He wanted to pet it and lie against it, pressing it with his cheek, telling it all the secret wants of his heart.

He stared up at it. "You are all mine," he said. "Even if you never move or spit fire, and just sit there and rust for fifty years, you are mine."

The rocket smelled of time and distance. It was like walking into a clock. It was finished with Swiss delicacy. One might wear it on one's watch fob. "I might even sleep here tonight," Bodoni whispered excitedly.

He sat in the pilot's seat.

He touched a lever.

He hummed in his shut mouth, his eyes closed.

The humming grew louder, louder, higher, higher, wilder, stranger, more exhilarating, trembling in him and leaning him forward and pulling him and the ship in a roaring silence and in a kind of metal screaming, while his fists flew over the controls, and his shut eyes quivered, and the sound grew and grew until it was a fire, a strength, a lifting and a pushing of power that threatened to tear him in half. He gasped. He hummed again and again, and did not stop, for it could not be stopped, it could only go on, his eyes tighter, his heart furious. "Taking off!" he screamed. *The jolting concussion! The thunder!* "The Moon!" he cried, eyes blind, tight. "The meteors!" *The silent rush in volcanic light.* "Mars. Oh, God, Mars! Mars!"

He fell back, exhausted and panting. His shaking hands came loose of the controls and his head tilted back wildly. He sat for a long time, breathing out and in, his heart slowing.

Slowly, slowly, he opened his eyes.

The junk yard was still there.

He sat motionless. He looked at the heaped piles of metal for a minute, his eyes never leaving them. Then, leaping up, he kicked the levers. "Take off, damn you!"

The ship was silent.

"I'll show you!" he cried.

Out in the night air, stumbling, he started the fierce motor of his terrible wrecking machine and advanced upon the rocket. He maneuvered the massive

weights into the moonlit sky. He readied his trembling hands to plunge the weights, to smash, to rip apart this insolently false dream, this silly thing for which he had paid his money, which would not move, which would not do his bidding. "I'll teach you!" he shouted.

But his hand stayed.

The silver rocket lay in the light of the moon. And beyond the rocket stood the yellow lights of his home, a block away, burning warmly. He heard the family radio playing some distant music. He sat for half an hour considering the rocket and the house lights, and his eyes narrowed and grew wide. He stepped down from the wrecking machine and began to walk, and as he walked he began to laugh, and when he reached the back door of his house he took a deep breath and called, "Maria, Maria, start packing. We're going to Mars!"

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"I can't *believe* it!"

"You will, you will."

The children balanced in the windy yard, under the glowing rocket, not touching it yet. They started to cry.

Maria looked at her husband. "What have you done?" she said. "Taken our money for this? It will never fly."

"It will fly," he said, looking at it.

"Rocket ships cost millions. Have you millions?"

"It will fly," he repeated steadily. "Now, go to the house, all of you. I have phone calls to make, work to do. Tomorrow we leave! Tell no one, understand? It is a secret."

The children edged off from the rocket, stumbling. He saw their small, feverish faces in the house windows, far away.

Maria had not moved. "You have ruined us," she said. "Our money used for this - this thing. When it should have been spent on equipment."

"You will see," he said.

Without a word she turned away.

"God help me," he whispered, and started to work.

Through the midnight hours trucks arrived, packages were delivered, and Bodoni, smiling, exhausted his bank account. With blowtorch and metal stripping he assaulted the rocket, added, took away, worked fiery magics and secret insults upon it. He bolted nine ancient automobile motors into the rocket's empty engine room. Then he welded the engine room shut, so none could see his hidden labor.

At dawn he entered the kitchen. "Maria," he said, "I'm ready for breakfast."

She would not speak to him.

At sunset he called to the children. "We're ready! Come on!" The house was silent.

"I've locked them in the closet," said Maria.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"You'll be killed in that rocket," she said. "What kind of rocket can you buy for two thousand dollars? A bad one!"

"Listen to me, Maria."

"It will blow up. Anyway, you are no pilot."

"Nevertheless, I can fly *this* ship. I have fixed it."

"You have gone mad," she said.

"Where is the key to the closet?"

"I have it here."

He put out his hand. "Give it to me."

She banded it to him. "You will kill them."

"No, no."

"Yes, you will. I *feel* it."

He stood before her. "You won't come along?"

"I'll stay here," she said.

"You will understand; you will see then," he said, and smiled. He unlocked the closet. "Come, children. Follow your father."

"Good-bye, good-bye, Mama!"

She stayed in the kitchen window, looking out at them, very straight and silent.

At the door of the rocket the father said, "Children, we will be gone a week. You must come back to school, and I to my business." He took each of their hands in turn. "Listen. This rocket is very old and will fly only *one* more journey. It will not fly again. This will be the one trip of your life. Keep your eyes wide."

"Yes, Papa."

"Listen, keep your ears clean. Smell the smells of a rocket. *Feel. Remember.* So when you return you will talk of it all the rest of your lives."

"Yes, Papa."

The ship was quiet as a stopped clock. The airlock hissed shut behind them. He strapped them all, like tiny mummies, into rubber hammocks. "Ready?" he called.

"Ready!" all replied.

"Take-off!" He jerked ten switches. The rocket thundered and leaped. The children danced in their hammocks, screaming.

"Here comes the Moon!"

The moon dreamed by. Meteors broke into fireworks. Time flowed away in a serpentine of gas. The children shouted. Released from their hammocks, hours later, they peered from the ports. "There's Earth!" "There's Mars!"

The rocket dropped pink petals of fire while the hour dials spun; the child eyes dropped shut. At last they hung like drunken moths in their cocoon hammocks.

"Good," whispered Bodoni, alone.

He tiptoed from the control room to stand for a long moment, fearful, at the airlock door.

He pressed a button. The airlock door swung wide. He stepped out. Into space? Into inky tides of meteor and gaseous torch? Into swift mileages and infinite dimensions?

No. Bodoni smiled.

All about the quivering rocket lay the junk yard. Rusting, unchanged, there stood the padlocked junk-yard gate, the little silent house by the river, the kitchen window lighted, and the river going down to the same sea. And in the center of the junk yard, manufacturing a magic dream, lay the quivering, purring rocket. Shaking and roaring, bouncing the netted children like flies in a web.

Maria stood in the kitchen window.

He waved to her and smiled.

He could not see if she waved or not. A small wave, perhaps. A small smile.

The sun was rising.

Bodoni withdrew hastily into the rocket. Silence. All still slept. He breathed easily. Tying himself into a hammock, he closed his eyes. To himself he prayed. Oh, let nothing happen to the illusion in the next six days. Let all of space come and go, and red Mars come up under our ship, and the moons of Mars, and let there be no flaws in the color film. Let there be three dimensions; let nothing go wrong with the hidden mirrors and screens that mold the fine illusion. Let time pass without crisis.

He awoke.

Red Mars floated near the rocket.

"Papa!" The children thrashed to be free.

Bodoni looked and saw red Mars and it was good and there was no flaw in it and he was very happy.

At sunset on the seventh day the rocket stopped shuddering.

"We are home," said Bodoni.

They walked across the junk yard from the open door of the rocket, their blood singing, their faces glowing.

"I have ham and eggs for all or you," said Maria, at the kitchen door.

"Mama, Mama, you should have come, to see it, to see Mars, Mama, and meteors, and everything!"

"Yes," she said.

At bedtime the children gathered before Bodoni. "We want to thank you, Papa."

"It was nothing."

"We will remember it for always, Papa. We will never forget."

Very late in the night Bodoni opened his eyes. He sensed that his wife was lying beside him, watching him. She did not move for a very long time, and then suddenly she kissed his cheeks and his forehead. "What's this?" he cried.

"You're the best father in the world," she whispered.

"Why?"

"Now I see," she said. "I understand."

She lay back and closed her eyes, holding his hand. "Is it a very lovely journey?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"Perhaps," she said, "perhaps, some night, you might take me on just a little trip, do you think?"

"Just a little one, perhaps," he said.

"Thank you," she said. "Good night."

"Good night," said Fiorello Bodoni.

Notes

QT — unusual abbreviation, probably Quarterly Terms.
fob — old use, small pocket for a watch, formerly made in the waistband of a pair of breeches.

The Twins

Muriel Spark
(born 1918)

When Jennie was at school with me, she was one of those well-behaved and intelligent girls who were, and maybe still are, popular with everyone in Scottish schools. The popularity of boys and girls in English schools so far as I gather, goes by other, less easily definable qualities, and also by their prowess at games. However, it was not so with us, as although Jennie was not much use at hockey, she was good and quiet and clever, and we all liked her. She was rather nice-looking too, plump, dark-haired, clean, neat.

She married a Londoner, Simon Reeves. I heard from her occasionally. She was living in Essex, and once or twice, when she came to London, we met. But it was some years before I could pay my long-promised visit to them, and by the time I got round to it, her twins, Marjie and Jeff, were five years old.

They were noticeably beautiful children; dark, like Jennie, with a charming way of holding their heads. Jennie was, as she always had been, a sensible girl. She made nothing of their beauty, on which everyone felt compelled to remark. “As long as they behave themselves – “said Jennie; and I thought what a pretty girl she was herself, and how little notice she took of her looks, and how much care she took with other people. I noticed that Jennie assumed that everyone else was inwardly as quiet, as peacefully inclined, as little prone to be perturbed, as

herself. I found this very restful and was grateful to Jennie for it. Her husband resembled her in this; but otherwise; Simon was more positive. He was brisk, full of activity, as indeed was Jennie; the difference between them was that Jennie never appeared to be bustling, even at her busiest hours, while Simon always seemed to live in the act of doing something. They were a fine match. I supposed he had gained from Jennie, during their six years of marriage, a little of her sweet and self-denying nature for he was really considerate. Simon would stop mowing the lawn at once, if he caught sight of the old man next door asleep in a deck-chair, although his need to do something about the lawn was apparently intense.

For Jennie's part, she had learned from Simon how to speak to men without embarrassment. This was something she was unable to do at the age of eighteen. Jennie got from Simon an insight into the mentalities of a fair variety of people, because his friends were curiously mixed, socially and intellectually. And in a way, Simon bore within himself an integrated combination of all those people he brought to the house; he represented them, almost, and kept his balance at the same time. So that Jennie derived from Simon a knowledge of the world, without actually weathering the world. A happy couple. And then, of course, there were the twins.

I arrived on a Saturday afternoon, to spend a week. The lovely twins were put to bed at six, and I did not use them much on the Sunday, as a neighbouring couple took them off for a day's picnicking with their own children. I spent most of Monday chatting with Jennie about old times and new times, while little Marjie and Jeff played in the garden. They were lively, full of noise and everything that goes with healthy children. And they were advanced for their years; both could read and write, taught by Jennie. She was sending them to school in September. They pronounced their words very clearly, and I was amused to notice some of Jennie's Scottish phraseology coming out of their English intonation.

Well, they went off to bed at six sharp that day; Simon came home shortly afterwards, and we dined in a pleasant humdrum peace.

It wasn't until the Tuesday morning that I really got on close speaking terms with the twins. Jennie took the car to the village to fetch some groceries, and for an hour I played with them in the garden. Again, I was struck by their loveliness and intelligence, especially of the little girl. She was the sort of child who noticed everything. The boy was quicker with words, however; his vocabulary was exceptionally large.

Jennie returned, and after tea, I went indoors to write letters. I heard Jennie telling the children, "Go and play yourselves down the other end of the garden and don't make too much noise, mind." She went to do something in the kitchen. After a while, there was a ring at the back door. The children scampered in from the garden, while Jennie answered the ring.

"Baker," said the man.

"Oh, yes," said Jennie: "Wait, I'll get my purse."

I went on writing my letter, only half-hearing the sound of Jennie's small change as she, presumably, paid the baker's man.

In a moment, Marjie was by my side.

"Hello," I said.

Marjie did not answer.

"Hello, Marjie," I said. "Have you come to keep me company?"

"Listen," said little Marjie in a whisper, looking over her shoulder. "Listen."

"Yes," I said.

She looked over her shoulder again, as if afraid her mother might come in.

"Will you give me half a crown?" whispered Marjie, holding out her hand.

"Well," I said, "what do you want it for?"

"I want it," said Marjie, looking furtively behind her again.

"Would your mummy want you to have it?" I said.

"Give me half a crown," said Marjie.

"I'd rather not," I said. "But I'll tell you what, I'll buy you a – "

But Marjie had fled, out of the door, into the kitchen.

"She'd rather not," I heard her say to someone.

Presently, Jennie came in, looking upset.

"Oh," she said, "I hope you didn't feel hurt. I only wanted to pay the baker, and I hadn't enough change. He hadn't any either; so just on the spur of the moment I sent Marjie for a loan of half a crown till tonight. But I shouldn't have done it. I *never* borrow anything as a rule."

"Well, of course!" I said. "Of course, I'll lend you half a crown. I've got plenty of change. I didn't understand and I got the message all wrong; I thought she wanted it for herself and that you wouldn't like that."

Jennie looked doubtful. I funked explaining the whole of Marjie's act. It isn't easy to give evidence against a child of five.

"Oh, they never ask for money," said Jennie. "I would never allow them to ask anyone for anything. They never do *that*."

"I'm sure they don't," I said, floundering a bit.

Jennie was much too kind to point out that this was I had just been suggesting. She was altogether too nice to let the incident make any difference during my stay. That night, Simon came home just after six. He had bought two elaborate spinning-tops for the twins. These tops had to be wound up, and they sang a tinny little tune while they spun.

"You'll ruin those children," said Jennie.

Simon enjoyed himself that evening, playing with the tops.

"You'll break them before the children even see them," said Jennie.

Simon put them away. But when one of his friends, a pilot from a near-by aerodrome, looked in later in the evening, Simon brought out the tops again; and the two men played delightedly with them, occasionally peering into the works

and discussing what made the tops go; while Jennie and I made scornful comments.

Little Marjie and Jeff were highly pleased with the tops next morning, but by the afternoon they had tired of them and gone on to something more in the romping line. After dinner Simon produced a couple of small gadgets. They were the things that go inside musical cigarette-boxes, he explained, and he thought they would fit into the spinning-tops, so that the children could have a change of tune.

"When they get fed up with *Pop Goes the Weasel*" he said, "they can have *In And Out the Windows*."

He got out one of the tops to take it apart and lift in the new tune. But when he had put the pieces together again, the top wouldn't sing at all. Jennie tried to help, but we couldn't get *In And Out the Windows*. So Simon patiently unpieced the top, put the gadgets aside, and said they would do for something else.

"That's Jeff's top," said Jennie, in her precise way, looking at the pieces on the carpet. "Jeff's is the red one, Marjie has the blue."

Once more, Simon started piecing the toy together, with the old tune inside it, while Jennie and I went to make some tea.

"I'll bet it won't work now," said Jennie with a giggle.

When we returned, Simon was reading and the top was gone.

"Did you fix it?" said Jennie.

"Yes," he said absently, "I've put it away."

It rained the next morning and the twins were indoors.

"We want to play with our tops," the twins said.

"Your Daddy took one of them to pieces last night, "Jennie informed them, "and put all the pieces back again."

Jennie had a stoic in her nature and did not believe in shielding her children from possible disappointment.

"He was hoping," she said, "to fit new tunes inside it. But it wouldn't work with the new tune … But he's going to try again."

They took this quite hopefully, and I didn't see much of them for some hours although, when the rain stopped and I went outside, I saw a small boy spinning his bright red top on the hard concrete of the garage floor. About noon little Jeff came running into the kitchen where Jennie was baking. He was howling hard, his small face distorted with grief. He held in both arms the spare parts of his top.

"My top!" he sobbed. "My top!"

"Goodness," said Jennie, "what did you do to it?" Don't cry, poor wee pet."

"I found it," he said. "I found my top all in pieces under that box behind Daddy's car."

"My top," he wept. "Daddy's broken my top." Marjie came in and looked on unmoved, hugging her blue top.

“But you were playing with the top this morning!” I said. ”Isn’t yours the red one? You were spinning it.”

“I was playing with the blue one,” he wept. “And then I found my own top all broken. Daddy broke it.”

Jennie sat them up to their dinner, and Jeff presently stopped crying.

Jennie was cheerful about it, although she said to ma afterwards, “I think Simon might have told me he couldn’t put it together again. But isn’t it just like a man? They’re that proud of themselves, men.”

As I have said, it isn’t easy to give evidence against a child of five. And especially to its mother.

Jennie tactfully put the pieces of the top back in the box behind the garage. They were still there, rusty and untouched, seven years later, for I saw them. Jennie got skipping ropes for the twins that day and when they had gone to bed, she removed Marjie’s top from the toy-cupboard. “It’ll only make wee Jeff cry to see it,” she said to me. “We’ll just forget about the tops. And I don’t want Simon to find out that I found *him* out,” she giggled.

I don’t think tops were ever mentioned in the household. If they were, I am sure Jennie would change the subject. An affectionate couple; it was impossible not to feel kindly towards them; not so, toward the children.

I was abroad for some years after that, and heard sometimes from Jennie at first4 later, we seldom wrote, and then not at all. I had been back in London for about a year when I met Jennie in Baker Street. She was excited about her children, now aged twelve, who had both won scholarships and were going off to boarding schools in the autumn.

“Come and see them while they’ve got their holidays,” she said. “We often talk about you, Simon and I.” It was good to hear Jennie’s kind voice again.

I went to stay for a few days in August. I felt sure the twins must have grown out of their peculiarities, and I was right. Jennie brought them to meet me at the station. They had grown rather quiet; both still extremely good-looking. These children possessed an unusual composure for their years. They were well-mannered as Jennie had been at their age, but without Jennie’s shyness.

Simon was pruning something in the garden when we got to the house.

“Why, you haven’t changed a bit,” he said. “A bit thinner maybe. Nice to see you so flourishing.”

Jennie went to make tea. In these surroundings she seemed to have endured no change; and she had made no change in her ways in the seven years since my last visit.

The twins started chatting about their school life, and Simon asked me questions I could not answer about the size of the population of the places I had lived in abroad. When Jennie returned, Simon leapt off to wash.

“I’m sorry Simon said that,” said Jennie to me when he had gone. “I don’t think he should have said it, but you know how tactless men are?”

“Said what?” I asked.

"About your looking thin and ill," said Jennie.

"Oh, I didn't take it *that* way!" I said.

"Didn't you?" said Jennie with an understanding smile. "That was sweet of you."

"Thin and haggard indeed!" said Jennie as she poured out the tea, and the twins discreetly passed the sandwiches.

That night I sat up late talking to the couple. Jennie retained the former habit of making a tea-session at nine o'clock and I accompanied her to the kitchen. While she was talking, she packed a few biscuits neatly into a small green box.

"There's the kettle boiling," said Jennie, going out with the box in her hand. "You know where the teapot is. I won't be a minute."

She returned in a few seconds and we carried off our tray.

It was past one before we parted for the night. Jennie had taken care to make me comfortable. She had put fresh flowers on the dressing-table, and there, beside my bed, was the little box of biscuits she had thoughtfully provided. I munched one while I looked out of the window at the calm country sky, ruminating upon Jennie's perennial merits. I have always regarded the lack of neurosis in people with awe. I am too much with brightly intelligent, highly erratic friends. In this Jennie, I decided, reposed a mystery which I and my like could not fathom.

Jennie had driven off next day to fetch the twins from a swimming-pool near-by, when Simon came home from his office.

"I hope you won't mind," he said, "but Jennie's got a horror of mice."

"Mice?" I said.

"Yes," said Simon, "so don't eat biscuits in your room if you wouldn't mind. Jennie was rather upset when she saw the crumbs but of course she'd have a fit if she knew I had told you. She'd rather die than tell you. But there it is, and I know you'll understand."

"But Jennie put the biscuits in my room herself," I explained. "She packed them in a box and took them up last night."

Simon looked worried. "We've had mice before," he said, "and she can't bear the thought of them upstairs."

"Jennie put the biscuits there," I insisted, feeling all in the wrong. "And," I said, "I saw Jennie pack the box. I'll ask her about it."

"Please," said Simon, "please don't do that. She would be so hurt to think I'd spoken about it. Please," he said, "go on eating biscuits in your room; I shouldn't have mentioned it."

Of course I promised not to eat any more of the things. And Simon, with a knowing smile, said he would give me larger helpings at dinner, so that I wouldn't go hungry.

The biscuit box had gone when I went to my room. Jennie was busy all next day preparing for a cocktail-party they were giving that night. The twins

devotedly gave up their day to the cutting of sandwiches and the making of curious patterns with small pieces of anchovy on diminutive squares of toast.

Jennie wanted some provisions from the village, and I offered to fetch them. I took the car, and noticed it was almost out of petrol; I got some on the way. When I returned, these good children were eating their supper standing in the kitchen, and without a word of protest, cleared off to bed before the guests arrived.

When Simon came home I met him in the hall. He was uneasy about the gin; he thought there might not be enough. He decided to go straight to the local and get more.

"And," ha said, "I've just remembered. The car's almost out of petrol. I promised to drive the Rawlings' home after the party. I nearly forgot. I'll get some petrol too/"

"Oh, I got some today," I said.

There were ten guests, four married couples and two unattached girls. Jennie and I did the handling round of snacks and Simon did the drinks. His speciality was a cocktail he had just discovered, called Loopamp. This Loopamp required him to make frequent excursions to the kitchen for replenishments of prune – juice and ice. Simon persuaded himself that Loopamp was in great demand among the guests. We all drank it obligingly. As he took his shakers to the kitchen for the fourth time, he called out to one of the unattached girls who was standing by the door, "Mollie, bring that lemon-jug too, will you?"

Mollie followed him with the lemon jug.

"Very good scholarships," Jennie was saying to an elderly man. "Jeff came fourth among the boys, and Marjie took eleventh place in the girls. There were only fourteen scholarships, so she was lucky. If it hadn't been for the geography she'd have been near the top. Her English teacher told me."

"Really?" said the man.

"Yes," said Jennie. "Mollie Thomas; you know Mollie Thomas. That's Marjie's English mistress. She's here tonight. Where's Mollie?" said Jennie, looking round.

"She's in the kitchen," I said.

"Making Loopamp, I expect," said Jennie. "What a name, Loopamp!"

Simon and Jennie looked rather jaded the next morning. I put it down to the Loopamp. They had very little to say, and when Simon had left for London, I asked Jennie how she was feeling.

"Not too good," she said. "Not too good. I am really sorry, my dear, about the petrol. I wish you had asked me for the money. Now, here it is, and don't say another word. Simon's so touchy."

"Touchy?"

"Well," said Jennie; "you know what men are like. I wish you had come to me about it. You know how scrupulous I am about debts. And so is Simon. He

just didn't know you had got the petrol, and, of course, he couldn't understand why you felt hurt."

I sent myself a wire that morning, summoning myself back to London. There wasn't a train before the 6.30, but I caught this. Simon arrived home as I was getting into the taxi, and he joined Jennie and the children on the doorstep to wave good-bye.

"Mind you coma again soon," said Jennie.

As I waved back, I noticed that the twins, who were waving to me, were not looking at me, but at their parents. There was an expression on their faces that I have only seen once before. That was at the Royal Academy, when I saw a famous portrait-painter standing bemused, giving a remarkable and long look at the work of his own hands. So, with wonder, pride and bewilderment, did the twins gaze upon Jennie and Simon.

I wrote and thanked them, avoiding any reference to future meetings. By return I had a letter from Simon.

I am sorry (he wrote) that you got the impression that Mollie and I were behaving improperly in the kitchen the night of out party, Jennie was very upset. She does not, of course, doubt my fidelity, but she is distressed that you could suggest such a thing. It was very embarrassing for Jennie to hear it in front of all her friends, and I hope, for Jennie's sake, you will not mention to her that I have written you about it. Jennie would rather die than hurt your feelings. Yours ever, Simon Reeves.

Notes

1. **Essex** – a county in the south-east of England
2. **Got round to it** – dealt with it (when more important matters have been dealt with).
3. **Without actually weathering the world** – here the phrase seems to be used for the sake of the style (note the alliteration), with the verb meaning "come through successfully".
4. **Were put to bed at six** – putting young children to bed early is traditional, even senior schoolchildren are sent to bed at nine.
5. **Sending them to school in September** – children are sent to school at the age of five; school starts on the first Tuesday in September.
6. **At the back door** – the back door is for the servants, the butcher, the baker, the milkman, etc. The main entrance is the front door.
7. **Half a crown** – the former British silver coins were the shilling (twenty of which made a pound), the two-shilling piece, the half-crown (worth two shillings and sixpence), and the sixpence.
8. **Pop Goes the Weasel** – traditional song of poor people who have to think about money or lack of it.
9. **In and out the Windows** – another traditional song.
10. **Wee** – Scottish for **very small**, used here to remind the reader about Jennie's background.
11. **Won scholarships** – in 1968 the Public Schools Commission, which was ser up by the Government to advise on the best way of integrating public schools with the state system of education, recommended that, eventually, at least half the entrants into public schools should be pupils in special need of boarding education, whose fees should be paid from public funds.

12. Put fresh flowers on the dressing table – etiquette requires that in a guest's bedroom there should be: a) a hand towel and bath towel, folded, on a chair, b) flowers on the dressing table, c) some kind of fire if it is cold, d) a new cake of soap if there is a wash-basin, otherwise new soap in the bathroom, e) a hot-water bottle, f) a tin of biscuits beside the bed, g) a couple of books and some magazines beside the bed, h) a clock, i) a box of matches, j) empty drawers with clean paper in them and at least four or five coat hangers in an empty part of a cupboard, even if you have coats hanging in the rest of it.
13. **The local** – (*colloq*.) for **local public house**, or **pub**, where alcoholic drinks are sold to be consumed on the premises (unlike the situation in the story).
14. **The Royal Academy** – The Royal Academy of Arts, founded in 1768. The Summer Exhibition of the Royal Academy consists of paintings, sculptures and architectural designs by living artists completed within the previous ten years and not exhibited before in London.

The Claxtons

Aldous Huxley
(1894-1963)

IN THEIR little house on the common, how beautifully the Claxtons lived, how spiritually! Even the cat was a vegetarian—at any rate officially—even the cat. Which made little Sylvia's behavior really quite inexcusable. For after all little Sylvia was human and six years old, whereas Pussy was only four and an animal. If Pussy could be content with greens and potatoes and milk and an occasional lump of nut butter, as a treat—Pussy, who had a tiger in her blood— surely Sylvia might be expected to refrain from surreptitious bacon-eating. Particularly in somebody else's house. What made the incident so specially painful to the Claxtons was that it had occurred under Judith's roof. It was the first time they had stayed with Judith since their marriage. Martha Claxton was rather afraid of her sister, afraid of her sharp tongue and her laughter and her scarifying irreverence. And on her own husband's account she was a little jealous of Judith's husband. Jack Bamborough's books were not only esteemed; they also brought in money. Whereas poor Herbert. "Herbert's art is too *inward,"* his wife used to explain, "too spiritual for most people to understand." She resented Jack Bamborough's success; it was too complete. She wouldn't have minded so much if he had made pots of money in the teeth of critical contempt; or if the critics had approved and he had made nothing. But to earn praise *and* a thousand a year—that was tod much. A man had no right to make the best of both worlds like that, when Herbert never sold anything and was utterly ignored. In spite of all which she had at last accepted Judith's often repeated invitation. After all, one ought to love one's sister and one's sister's husband. Also all the chimneys in the house on the common needed sweeping and the roof would have to be repaired where the rain was coming in. Judith's invitation arrived most conveniently. Martha accepted it. And then Sylvia went and did that really inexcusable thing. Coming down to breakfast before the others she stole a rasher from the dish of bacon with which her aunt and uncle

unregenerately began the day. Her mother's arrival prevented her from eating it on the spot; she had to hide it. Weeks later when Judith was looking for something in the inlaid Italian cabinet, in one of the drawers a litde pool of dried grease still bore eloquent witness to the crime. The day passed; but Sylvia found no opportunity to consummate the outrage she had begun. It was only in the evening, while her little brother Paul was being given his bath, that she was able to retrieve the now stiff and clammy-cold rasher. With guilty speed she hurried upstairs with it and hid it under her pillow. When the lights were turned out she ate it. In the morning, the grease stains and a piece of gnawed rind betrayed her. Judith went into fits of inextinguishable laughter.

"It's like the Garden of Eden," she gasped between the explosions of her mirth. "The meat of the Pig of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But if you *will* surround bacon with categorical imperatives and mystery, what can you expect, my dear Martha?"

Martha went on smiling her habitual smile of sweet forgiving benevolence. But inside she felt extremely angry; the child had made a fool of them all in front of Judith and Jack., She would have liked to give her a good smacking. Instead of which—for one must never be rough with a child, one must never show it that one is annoyed—she reasoned with Sylvia, she explained, she appealed, more in sorrow than in anger, to her better feelings.

"Your daddy and I don't think it's right to make animals suffer when we can eat vegetables which don't suffer anything."

"How do you know they don't?" asked Sylvia, shooting out the question malignantly. Her face was ugly with sullen ill-temper.

"We don't think it right, darling," Mr. Claxton went on, ignoring the interruption. "And I'm sure you wouldn't either, if you realized. Think, my pet; to make that bacon, a poor little pig had to be killed. To be *killed,* Sylvia. Think of that. A poor innocent little pig that hadn't done anybody any harm."

"But I hate pigs," cried Sylvia. Her sullenness flared up into sudden ferocity; her eyes that had been fixed and glassy with a dull resentment, darkly flashed. "I hate them, hate them, *hate* them."

"Quite right," said Aunt Judith, who had come in most inopportunely in the middle of the lecture. "Quite right. Pigs *are* disgusting. That's why people called' them pigs."

Martha was glad to get back to the little house on the common and their beautiful life, happy to escape from Judith's irreverent laughter and the standing reproach of Jack's success. […]

"Isn't it lovely to come back to our own dear little house!" she cried, as the station taxi drove them bumpily over the track that led across the common to the garden gate. "Isn't it lovely?"

"Lovely!" said Herbert dutifully echoing her rather forced rapture.

"Lovely!" repeated little Paul, rather thickly through his adenoids. He was a sweet child, when he wasn't whining, and always did and said what was expected of him.

Through the window of the cab Sylvia looked critically at the long low house among the trees. "I think Aunt Judith's house is nicer," she concluded with decision.

Martha turned upon her the sweet illumination of her smile. "Aunt Judith's house is bigger," she said, "and much grander. But this is Home, my sweet. Our very own Home."

"All the same," persisted Sylvia, "I like Aunt Judith's house better."

Martha smiled at her forgivingly and shook her head. "You'll understand what I mean when you're older," she said. A strange child, she was thinking; a difficult child. Not like Paul, who was so easy. Too easy. Paul fell in with suggestions, did what he was told, took his color from the spiritual environment. Not Sylvia. She had her own will. Paul was like his father. In the girl Martha saw something of her own stubbornness and passion and determination. If the will could be well directed . .. But the trouble was that it was so often hostile, resistant, contrary. Martha thought of that deplorable occasion, only a few months before, when Sylvia, in a fit of rage at not being allowed to do something she wanted to do, had spit in her father's face. Herbert and Martha had agreed that she ought to be punished. But how.? Not smacked, of course; smacking was out of the question. The important thing was to make the child realize the heinousness of what she had done. In the end they decided that the best thing would be for Herbert to talk to her very seriously (but very gently, of course) and then leave her to choose her own punishment; Let her conscience decide. It seemed an excellent idea.

"I want to tell you a story, Sylvia," said Herbert that evening, taking the child onto his knees, "About a little girl, who had a daddy who loved her so much, so much." Sylvia looked at him suspiciously, but said nothing. "And one day that little girl, who was sometimes rather a thoughtless little girl, though I don't believe she was really naughty, was doing something that it wasn't right or good for her to do. And her daddy told her not to. And what do you think that little girl did? She spat in her daddy's face. And her daddy was very, very sad. Because what his little girl did was wrong, wasn't it?" Sylvia nodded a brief defiant assent. "And when one has done something wrong, one must be punished, mustn't one?" The child nodded again. Herbert was pleased; his words had had their effect; her conscience was being touched. Over the child's head he exchanged a glance with Martha. "If you had been that daddy," he went on, "and the little girl you loved so much had spat in your face, what would you have done, Sylvia?"

"Spat back," Sylvia answered fiercely and without hesitation.

At the recollection of the scene Martha sighed. Sylvia was difficult, Sylvia was decidedly a problem. The cab drew up at the gate; the Claxtons

unpacked themselves and their luggage. Inadequately tipped, the driver made his usual scene. Bearing his rucksack, Herbert turned away with a dignified patience. He was used to this sort of thing; it was a chronic martyrdom. The unpleasant duty of paying was always his. Martha only provided the cash. With what extreme and yearly growing reluctance! He was always between the devil of the undertipped and the deep sea of Martha's avarice.

"Four miles' drive and a tuppenny tip!" shouted the cab driver at Herbert's receding and rucksacked back.

Martha grudged him even the twopence. But convention demanded that something should be given. Conventions are stupid things; but even the Children of the Spirit must make some compromise with the World. In this case Martha was ready to compromise with the World to the extent of twopence. But no more. Herbert knew that she would have been very angry if he had given more. Not openly, of course; not explicitly. She never visibly lost her temper or her smile. But her forgiving disapproval would have weighed heavily on him for days. And for days she would have found excuses for economizing in order to make up for the wanton extravagance of a sixpenny instead of a twopenny tip. Her economies were mostly on the food, and their justification was always spiritual. Eating was gross; high living was incompatible with high thinking; it was dreadful to think of the poor going hungry while you yourself were living in luxurious gluttony. There would be a cutting down of butter and Brazil nuts, of the more palatable vegetables and the choicer fruits. Meals would come to consist more and more exclusively of porridge, potatoes, cabbages, bread. Only when the original extravagance had been made up several hundred times would Martha begin to relax her asceticism. Herbert never ventured to complain. After one of these bouts of plain living he would for a long time be very careful to avoid other extravagances, even when, as in this case, his economies brought him into painful and humiliating conflict with those on whom they were practised.

Herbert passed over the threshold and closed the door behind him. Safe! He took off his rucksack and deposited it carefully on a chair. Gross, vulgar brute! But anyhow he had taken himself off with the twopence. Martha would have no cause to complain or cut down the supply of peas and beans. In a mild and spiritual way Herbert was very fond of his food. So was Martha—darkly and violently fond of it. That was why she had become a vegetarian, why her economies were always at the expense of the stomach— precisely because she liked food so much. She suffered when she deprived herself of some delicious morsel. But there was a sense in which she loved her suffering more than the morsel. Denying herself, she felt her whole being irradiated by a glow of power; suffering, she was strengthened, her will was wound up, her energy enhanced. The dammed-up instincts rose and rose behind the wall of voluntary mortification, deep and heavy with potentialities of force. In the struggle between the instincts Martha's love of power was generally strong enough to

overcome her greed; among the hierarchy of pleasures, the joy of exerting the personal conscious will was more intense than the joy of eating even Turkish delight or strawberries and cream. Not always, however; for there were occasions when, overcome by a sudden irresistible desire, Martha would buy and, in a single day, secretly consume a whole pound of chocolate creams, throwing herself upon the sweets with the same heavy violence as had characterized her first passion for Herbert. With the passage of time and the waning, after the birth of her two children, of her physical passion for her husband, Martha's orgies among the chocolates became more frequent. […]

Three weeks after the Claxtons' return to their little house on the common, the War broke out. […]

In the first weeks o£ confusion she had been panic-stricken; she imagined that all her money was lost, she saw herself with Herbert and the children, hungry and houseless, begging from door to door. She immediately dismissed her two servants, she reduced the family food supply to a prison ration. Time passed and her money came in very much as usual. But Martha was so much delighted with the economies she had made that she would not revert to the old mode of life.

"After all," she argued, "it's really not pleasant to have strangers in the house to serve you. And then, why should they serve us? They who are just as good as we are." It was a hypocritical tribute to Christian doctrine; they were really immeasurably inferior. "Just because we happen to be able to pay them— that's why they have to serve us.- It's always made me feel uncomfortable and ashamed. Hasn't it you, Herbert?"

"Always," said Herbert, who always agreed with his wife.

"Besides," she went on, "I think one ought to do one's own work. One oughtn't to get out of touch with the humble small" realities of life. I've felt really happier since I've been doing the house work, haven't you?"

Herbert nodded.

"And it's so good for the children. It teaches them humility and service. […]"

Doing without servants saved a clear hundred and fifty a year. But the economies she made on food were soon counterbalanced by the results of scarcity and inflation. With every rise in prices Martha's enthusiasm for ascetic spirituality became more than ever fervid and profound. So too did her conviction that the children would be spoilt and turned into worldlings if she sent them to an expensive boarding school. "Herbert and I believe very strongly in home education, don't we, Herbert?" And Herbert would agree that they believed in it very strongly indeed. Home education without a governess, insisted Martha. Why should one let one's children be influenced by strangers? Perhaps badly influenced. Anyhow, not influenced in exactly the way one would influence them oneself. People hired governesses because they dreaded the hard work of educating their children, And of course it *was* hard work— the harder,

the higher your ideals. But wasn't it worth making sacrifices for one's children? With the uplifting question, Martha's smile curved itself into a crescent of more than ordinary soulfulness. Of course it was worth it. The work was an incessant delight—wasn't it, Herbert? For what could be more delightful, more profoundly soul-satisfying than to help your own children to grow up beautifully, to guide them, to mold their characters into ideal forms, to lead their thoughts and desires into the noblest channels? Not by any system of compulsion, of course; children must never be compelled; the art of education was persuading children to mold themselves in the most ideal, forms, was showing them how to be the makers of their own higher selves, was firing them with enthusiasm for what Martha felicitously described as "self-sculpture".

On Sylvia, her mother had to admit to herself, this art of education was hard to practise. Sylvia didn't want to sculpture herself, at any rate into the forms which Martha and Herbert found most beautiful. She was quite discouragingly without that sense of moral beauty on which the Claxtons relied as a means of education. It was ugly, they told her to be rough, to disobey, to say rude things and tell lies. It was beautiful to be gentle and polite, obedient and truthful. "But I don't mind being ugly," Sylvia would retort. There was no possible answer, except a spanking; and spanking was against the Claxtons' principles.

Aesthetic and intellectual beauty seemed to mean as little to Sylvia as moral beauty. What difficulties they had to make her take an interest in the piano! This was the more extraordinary, her mother considered, as Sylvia was obviously musical; when she was two-and-a-half she had already been able to sing "Three Blind Mice" in tune. But she didn't want to learn her scales. Her mother talked to her about a wonderful little boy called Mozart. Sylvia hated Mozart. "No, no!" she would shout, whenever her mother mentioned the abhorred name. "I don't want to hear." And to make sure of not hearing, she would put her fingers in her ears. Nevertheless, by the time she was nine she could play "The Happy Peasant" from beginning to end without a mistake. Martha still had hopes of turning her into the musician of the family. Paul, meanwhile, was the future Giotto; it had been decided that he inherited his father's talents. He accepted his career as docilely as he had consented to learn his letters. Sylvia, on the other hand, simply refused to read.

"But think," said Martha ecstatically, "how *wonderful* it will be when you can open any book and read all the *beautiful* things people have written!" Her coaxing was ineffective.

"I like playing better," said Sylvia obstinately, with that expression of sullen bad temper which was threatening to become as chronic as her mother's smile. True to their principles, Herbert and Martha let her play; but it was a grief to them.

"You make your daddy and mummy so sad," they said, trying to appeal to her better feelings. "So sad. Won't you try to read to make your daddy and

mummy happy?" The child confronted them with an expression of sullen, stubborn wretchedness, and shook her head. "Just to please us," they wheedled.

"You make *us so* sad." Sylvia looked from one mournfully forgiving face to the other and burst into tears.

"Naughty," she sobbed incoherently. "Naughty. Go away." She hated them for being sad, for making her sad. "No, go away, go away," she screamed when they tried to comfort her. She cried inconsolably; but still, she wouldn't read.

Paul, on the other hand, was beautifully teachable and plastic. Slowly (for, with his adenoids, he was not a very intelligent boy) but with all the docility that could be desired, he learnt to read about the lass on the ass in the grass and other such matters. "Hear how beautifully Paul reads," Martha would say, in the hope of rousing Sylvia to emulation. But Sylvia would only make a contemptuous face and walk out of the room. In the end she taught herself to read, secretly, in a couple of weeks. Her parents' pride in the achievement was tempered when they discovered her motives for making the extraordinary effort.

"But what is this dreadful little book?" asked Martha holding up the copy of "*Nick Carter and the Michigan Boulevard Murderers"* which she had discovered carefully hidden under Sylvia's winter underclothing. On the cover was a picture of a man being thrown off the roof of a skyscraper by a gorilla.

The child snatched it from her. "It's a lovely book," she retorted, flushing darkly with an anger that was intensified by her sense of guilt.

"Darling," said Martha, beautifully smiling on the surface of her annoyance, "you mustn't snatch like that. Snatching's *ugly*." "Don't care." "Let me look at it, please." Martha held out her hand. She smiled, but her pale face was heavily determined, her eyes commanded.

Sylvia confronted' her, stubbornly she shook her head. "No, I don't want to."

"Please," begged her mother, more forgivingly and more commandingly than ever, "please." And in the end, with a sudden outburst of tearful rage, Sylvia handed over the book and ran off into the garden. "Sylvia, Sylvia!" her mother called. But the child would not come back. To have stood by while her mother violated the secrets of her private world would have been unbearable.

Owing to his adenoids Paul looked and almost was an imbecile. Without being a Christian Scientist, Martha disbelieved in doctors; more particularly she disliked surgeons, perhaps because they were so expensive. She left Paul's adenoids unextirpated; they grew and festered in his throat. From November to May he was never without a cold, a quinsy, an earache. The winter of 1921 was a particularly bad one for Paul. He began by getting influenza which turned into pneumonia, caught measles during his convalescence and developed at the New Year an infection of the middle ear which threatened to leave him permanently deaf. The doctor peremptorily advised an operation, treatment, a convalescence in Switzerland, at an altitude and in the sun. Martha hesitated to follow his

advice.'She had come to be so firmly convinced of her poverty that she did not see how she could possibly afford to do what the doctor ordered. In her perplexity she wrote to Judith. Two days later Judith arrived in person.

"But do you want to kill the boy?" She asked her sister fiercely. "Why didn't you get him out of this filthy dank hole weeks ago?"

In a few hours she had arranged everything. Herbert and Martha were to start at once with the boy. They were to travel direct to Lausanne by sleeper. "But surely a sleeper's hardly necessary," objected Martha. "You forget" (she beautifully smiled) "we're simple folk." "I only remember you've got a sick child with you," said Judith and the sleeper was booked. At Lausanne he was to be operated. (Expensive reply-paid telegram to the clinic; poor Martha suffered.) And when he was well enough he was to go to a sanatorium at Leysin. (Another telegram, for which Judith paid, however. Martha forgot to give the money back). Martha and Herbert, meanwhile, were to .find a good hotel, where Paul would join them as soon as his treatment was over. And they were to stay at least six months and preferably a year. Sylvia, meanwhile, was to stay with her aunt in England; Judith would try to find a tenant for the house on the common. "Talk of savages!" said Judith to her husband. "I've never seen such a little cannibal as Sylvia."

"It's what comes of having vegetarian parents, I suppose."

"Poor little creature!" Judith went on with an indignant pity. "There are times when I'd like to drown Martha, she's such a criminal fool. Bringing those children up without ever letting them go near another child of their own age! It's scandalous! And then talking to them about spirituality and Jesus and *ahimsa* and beauty and goodness knows what! And not wanting them to play stupid games, but be artistic! And always being sweet, even when she's furious! It's dreadful, really dreadful! And so silly. Can't she see that the best way of turning a child into a devil is to try to bring it up as an angel? Ah, well . . ." She sighed and was silent, pensively; she herself had had no children and, if the doctors were right, never would have children.

The weeks passed and gradually the little savage was civilized. Her first lessons were lessons in the art of moderation. The food, which at the Bamboroughs' house was good and plentiful, was at the beginning a terrible temptation to a child accustomed to the austerities of the spiritual life.

"There'll be more tomorrow," Judith would say, when the child asked for yet another helping of pudding. "You're not a snake, you know; you can't store up today's overeating for next week's dinners. The only thing you can do with too much food is to be sick with it."

At first Sylvia would insist, would wheedle and whine for more. But luckily, as Judith remarked to her husband, luckily, she had a delicate liver. Her aunt's prophecies were only too punctually realized. After three or four bilious attacks Sylvia learned to control her greed. Her next lesson was in obedience. The obedience she was accustomed to give her parents was slow and grudging.

Herbert and Martha never, on principle, commanded, but only suggested. It was a system that had therefore almost forced upon the child a habit of saying «no» automatically, to whatever proposition was made to her.

"No, no, no!" she regularly began, and then gradually suffered herself to be persuaded, reasoned, or moved by the expression of her parents' sadness into a belated and generally grudging acquiescence. Obeying at long last, she felt an obscure resentment against those who had not compelled her to obey at once. Like most children, she would have liked to be relieved compulsorily of responsibility for her own actions; she was angry with her father and mother for forcing her to expend so much will in resisting them, such a quantity of painful emotion in finally letting her will be overcome. It would have been so much simpler if they had insisted from the first, had compelled her to obey at once and so spared her all her spiritual effort and pain. Darkly and bitterly did she resent the incessant appeal they made to her better feelings. It wasn't fair, it wasn't fair. They had no right to smile and forgive and make her feel a beast, to fill her with sadness by being sad themselves. Sylvia felt that they were somehow taking a cruel advantage of her. And perversely, just because she hated their being sad, she deliberately went out of her way to say and do the things that would most sorely distress them. One of her favorite tricks was to threaten to "go and walk across the plank over the sluice". Between the smooth pond and the shallow rippling of the stream, the gentle water became for a moment tenable. Pent in a narrow channel of oozy brickwork six feet of cataract tumbled with unceasing clamor into a black and heaving pool. It was a horrible place. How often her parents had begged her not to play near the sluice! Her threat would make them repeat their recommendations; they would implore her to be reasonable. "No, I won't be reasonable," Sylvia would shout and run off towards the sluice. If, in fact, she never approached to within less than five yards of the roaring gulf, that was because she was much more terrified for herself than her parents were for her. But she would go as near as she dared for the pleasure (the pleasure which she hated) of hearing her mother mournfully express her sadness at having a little girl so disobedient, so selfishly reckless of danger. She tried the same trick with her Aunt Judith. "I shall go into the woods by myself," she menaced one day, scowling. To her great surprise, instead of begging her to be reasonable and not to distress the grownups by disobediently running into danger, Judith only shrugged her shoulders. "Trot along, then, if you want to be a little fool," she said without looking up from her letter. Indignantly, Sylvia trotted; but she was frightened of being alone in the huge wood. Only pride kept her from returning at once. Damp, dirty, tear-stained and scratched, she was brought back two hours later by a gamekeeper.

"What luck," said Judith to her husband, "what enormous luck that the little idiot should have gone and got herself lost."

The scheme of things was marshalled against the child's delinquency. But Judith did not rely exclusively on the scheme of things to enforce her code; she

provided her own sanctions. Obedience had to be prompt, or else there were prompt reprisals. Once Sylvia succeeded in provoking her aunt to real anger. The scene made a profound impression on her. An hour later she crept diffidently and humbly, to where her aunt was sitting. "I'm sorry. Aunt Judith," she said, "I'm sorry," and burst into tears. It was the first time she had ever spontaneously asked for forgiveness.

The lessons which profited Sylvia most were those which she learnt from other children. After a certain number of rather unsuccessful and occasionally painful experiments she learnt to play, to behave as an equal among equals. Hitherto she had lived almost exclusively as a chronological inferior among grown-ups, in a state of unceasing rebellion and guerrilla warfare. […] With the little Carters from down the road, the little Holmeses from over the way, she was now suddenly required to adapt herself to democracy and parliamentary government. There were difficulties at first; but when in the end the little bandit had acquired the art of civility, she was unprecedentedly happy. The grown-ups exploited the children's sociability for their own educational ends. Judith got up amateur theatricals; there was a juvenile performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Mrs. Holmes, who was musical, organized the children's enthusiasm for making a noise into part singing. Mrs. Carter taught them country dances. In a few months Sylvia had acquired all that passion for the Higher Life which her mother had been trying to cultivate for years, always in vain. She loved poetry, she loved music, she loved dancing — rather platonically, it was true; for Sylvia was one of those congenitally clumsy and aesthetically insensitive natures whose earnest passion for the arts is always destined to remain unconsummated. She loved ardently, but hopelessly; yet not unhappily for she was not yet, perhaps never would be, conscious of the hopelessness of her passion. She even loved the arithmetic and geography, the English history and French grammar, which Judith had arranged to have her imbibe, along with the little Carters, from the little Carters' formidable governess.

"Do you remember what she was like when she arrived?" said Judith one day to her husband.

He nodded, comparing in his mind the sullen little savage of nine months before with the gravely, earnestly radiant child who had just left the room.

"I feel like a lion-tamer," Judith went on with a little laugh that covered a great love and a great pride. "But what does one do, Jack, when the lion takes to high Anglicanism? Dolly Carter's being prepared for confirmation and Sylvia's caught the infection." Judith sighed. "I suppose she's already thinking we're both damned."

"She'd be damned herself if she didn't," Jack answered philosophically. "Much more seriously damned, what's more; because she'd be damned in *this* world. It would be a terrible flaw in her character, if she didn't believe in some sort of rigmarole at this age."

"But suppose," said Judith, "she were to go on believing in it."

Martha, meanwhile, had not been liking Switzerland, perhaps because it suited her, physically, too well. There was something, she felt, rather indecent about enjoying such perfect health as she enjoyed at Leysin. It was difficult when one was feeling so full of animal spirits, to think very solicitously about suffering humanity and God, about Buddha and the higher life and what-not. She resented the genial care-free selfishness of her own healthy body. Waking periodically to conscience-stricken realizations that she had been thinking of nothing for hours and even days together but the pleasure of sitting in the sun, of breathing the aromatic air beneath the pines, of walking in the high meadows picking flowers and looking at the view, she would launch a campaign of intensive spirituality; but after a little while the sun and the bright eager air were too much for her and she would relapse once more into a state of mere well-being.

"I shall be glad," she kept saying, "when Paul is quite well again and we can go back to England." […]

Fifteen months after their departure the Claxtons were back again in the house on the common. Martha had ,a cold and a touch of lumbago; deprived of mountain exercise, Herbert was already succumbing to the attacks of his old enemy, chronic constipation. They overflowed with spirituality.

Sylvia also returned to the house on the common and, for the first weeks, it was Aunt Judith here and Aunt Judith there, at Aunt Judith's we did this. Aunt Judith never made me do that. Beautifully smiling, but with unacknowledged resentment at her heart, "Dearest," Martha would say, "I'm not Aunt Judith". She really hated her sister for having succeeded where she herself had failed. "You've done wonders with Sylvia," she wrote to Judith, "and Herbert and I can never be sufficiently grateful." And she would say the same in conversation to friends. "We can never be grateful enough to her; can we, Herbert?" And Herbert would punctually agree that they could never be grateful enough. But the more grateful to her sister she dutifully and even supererogatively was, the more Martha hated her, the more she resented Judith's success and her influence over the child. True, the influence had been unequivocally good; but it was precisely because it had been so good that Martha resented it. It was unbearable to her that frivolous, unspiritual Judith should have been able to influence the child more happily than she had ever done. She had left Sylvia sullenly ill-mannered and disobedient, full of rebellious hatred for all the things which her parents admired; she returned to find her well behaved, obliging, passionately interested in music and poetry, earnestly preoccupied with the newly discovered problems of religion. It was unbearable.

Patiently Martha set to work to undermine her sister's influence on the child. Judith's own work had made the task more easy for her. For thanks to Judith, Sylvia was now malleable. Contact with children of her own age had warmed and softened and sensitized her, had mitigated her savage egotism and opened her up towards external influences. The appeal to her better feelings

could now be made with the certainty of evoking a positive, instead of a rebelliously negative, response. Martha made the appeal constantly and with skill. She harped (with a beautiful resignation, of course) on the family's poverty. If Aunt Judith did and permitted many things which were not done and permitted in the house on the common, that was because Aunt Judith was so 'much better off. She could afford many luxuries which the Claxtons had to do without. "Not that your father and I mind doing without," Martha insisted. "On the contrary. It's really rather a blessing not to be rich. You remember what Jesus said about rich people." Sylvia remembered and was thoughtful. Martha would develop her theme; being able to afford luxuries and actually indulging in them had a certain coarsening, despiritualizing effect. It was so easy to become worldly.

The implication, of course, was that Aunt Judith and Uncle Jack had been tainted by worldliness. Poverty had happily preserved the Claxtons from the danger—poverty and also, Martha insisted, their own meritorious wish. For of course they could have afforded to keep at least one servant, even in these difficult times; but they had preferred to do without, "because, you see, serving is better than being served". Jesus had said that the way of Mary was better than the way of Martha. "But I'm a Martha," said Martha Claxton, "who tries her best to be a Mary too. Martha *and* Mary—that's the best way of all. Practical service *and* contemplation. Your father isn't' one of those artists who selfishly detach themselves from all contact with the humble facts of life. He is a creator, but he is not too proud to do the humblest service." Poor Herbert! He couldn't have refused to do the humblest service, if Martha had commanded. Some artists, Martha continued, thought only of immediate success, worked only with an eye to profits and applause. But Sylvia's father, on the contrary, was one who worked without thought of the public, only for the sake of creating truth and beauty.

On Sylvia's mind, these and similar discourses, constantly repeated with variations and in every emotional key, had a profound effect. With all the earnestness of puberty she desired to be good and spiritual and disinterested, she longed to sacrifice herself, it hardly mattered to what so long as the cause was noble. Her mother had now provided her with the cause. She gave herself up to it with all the stubborn energy of her nature. How fiercely she practised her piano! With what determination she read through even the dreariest books! She kept a note-book in which she copied out the most inspiring passages of her daily reading; and another in which she recorded her good resolutions and with them, in an agonized and chronically remorseful diary, her failures to abide by the resolutions, her lapses from grace. "Greed. Promised I'd eat only one greengage. Took four at lunch. None tomorrow. O.G.H.M.T.B.G."

"What does O.G.H.M.T.B.G. mean?" asked Paul maliciously one day.

Sylvia flushed darkly. "You've been reading my diary!" she said. "Oh, you beast, you little beast." And suddenly she threw herself on her brother like a

fury. His nose was bleeding when he got away from her. "If you ever look at it again, I'll kill you." And standing there with her clenched teeth and quivering nostrils, her hair flying loose round her pale face, she looked as though she meant it. "I'll kill you," she repeated. Her rage was justified; O.G.H.M.T.B.G. meant "O God, help me to be good".

That evening she came to Paul and asked his pardon.

Aunt Judith and Uncle Jack had been in America for the best part of a year.

"Yes, go; go by all means," Martha had said when Judith's letter came, inviting Sylvia to spend a few days with them in London. "You mustn't miss such a chance of going to the opera and all those lovely concerts."

"But is it quite fair, mother?" said Sylvia hesitatingly. "I mean, I don't want to go and enjoy myself all alone. It seems somehow. . ."

"But you ought to go," Martha interrupted her. She felt so certain of Sylvia now that she had no fears of Judith. "For a musician like you it's a necessity to hear 'Parsifal' and 'The Magic Flute'. I was meaning to take you myself next year; but now the opportunity has turned up this year, you must take it. Gratefully," she added, with a sweetening of her smile.

Sylvia went. "Parsifal" was like going to church, but much more so. Sylvia listened with a reverent excitement that was, however, interrupted from time to time by the consciousness, irrelevant, ignoble even, but oh how painful! that her frock, her stockings, her shoes were dreadfully different from those worn by that young girl of her own age, whom she had noticed in the row behind as she came in. And the girl, it had seemed to her, had returned her gaze derisively. Round the Holy Grail there was an explosion of bells and harmonious roaring. She felt ashamed of herself for thinking of such unworthy things in the presence of the mystery. And when, in the entr'acte; Aunt Judith offered her an ice, she refused almost indignantly.

Aunt Judith was surprised. "But you used to love ices so much."

"But not now. Aunt Judith. Not now." An ice in church—what sacrilege! She tried to think about the Grail. A vision of green satin shoes and a lovely mauve artificial flower floated up before her inward eye.

Next day they went shopping. It was a bright cloudless morning of early summer. The windows of the drapers' shops in Oxford Street had blossomed with bright pale colors. The waxen dummies were all preparing to go to Ascot, to Henley, were already thinking of the Eton and Harrow match. The pavements were crowded; an immense blurred noise filled the air like a mist. The scarlet and golden buses looked regal and the sunlight glittered with a rich and oily radiance on the polished flanks of the passing limousines. A little procession of unemployed slouched past with a brass band at their head making joyful music, as though they were only too happy to be unemployed, as though it were a real pleasure to be hungry.

Sylvia had not been in London for nearly two years, and these crowds, this noise, this innumerable wealth of curious and lovely things in every shining window went to her head. She felt even more excited than she had felt at "Parsifal".

For an hour they wandered through Selfridge's. "And now, Sylvia," said Aunt Judith, when at last she had ticked off every item on her long list, "now you can choose whichever of these frocks you like best." She waved her hand. A display of Summer Modes for Misses surrounded them on every side. Lilac and lavender, primrose and pink and green, blue and mauve, white, flowery, spotted—a sort of herbaceous border of young frocks. "Whichever you like," Aunt Judith repeated. "Or if you'd prefer a frock for the evening . . ."

Green satin shoes and a big mauve flower. The girl had looked derisively. It was unworthy, unworthy.

"No, really. Aunt Judith." She blushed, she stammered. "Really, I don't need a frock. Really."

"All the more reason for having it if you don't need it. Which one?"

"No, really. I don't, I can't . . ." And suddenly, to Aunt Judith's uncomprehending astonishment, she burst into tears.

The year was 1924. The house on the common basked in the soft late April sunshine. Through the open windows of the drawing room came the sound of Sylvia's practising. Stubbornly, with a kind of fixed determined fury, she was trying to master Chopin's Valse in D flat. Under her conscientious and insensitive fingers the lilt and languor of the dance rhythm was laboriously sentimental, like the rendering on the piano of a cornet solo outside a public house; and the quick flutter of semi-quavers in the contrasting passages was a flutter, when Sylvia played, of mechanical butterflies, a beating of nickelplated wings. Again and again she played, again and again. In the little copse on the other side of the stream at the bottom of the garden the birds went about their business undisturbed. On the trees the new small leaves were like the spirits of leaves, almost immaterial, but vivid like little flames at the tip of every twig. Herbert was sitting on a tree stump in the middle of the wood doing those yoga breathing exercises, accompanied by auto-suggestion, which he found so good for his health. Closing his right nostril with a long forefinger, he breathed in deeply through his left —in, in, deeply, while he counted four heart beats. Then through sixteen beats' he held his breath and between each beat he said to himself very quickly, "I'm not constipated, I'm riot constipated". When he had made the affirmation sixteen times, he closed his left nostril and breathed out, while he counted eight, through his right. After which he began again. The left nostril was the more favored; for it breathed in with the air a faint cool sweetness of primroses and leaves and damp earth. Near him, on a camp stool, Paul was making a drawing of an oak tree. Art at all costs; beautiful, uplifting, disinterested Art. Paul was bored. Rotten old tree —what was the point of drawing it? All round him the sharp green spikes of the wild hyacinths came

thrusting out of the dark mold. One had pierced through a dead leaf and lifted it, transfixed, into the air. A few more days of sunshine and every spike would break out into blue flower. Next time his mother sent him into Godalming on his bicycle, Paul was thinking, he'd see if he couldn't overcharge her two shillings on the shopping instead of one, as he had done last time. Then he'd be able to buy some chocolate as well as go to the cinema; and perhaps even some cigarettes, though that might be dangerous. […]

"Well, Paul," said his father, who had taken a sufficient dose of his mystical equivalent of Cascara, "how are you getting on?" He got up from his tree stump and wulked across the glade to where the boy was sitting. The passage of time had altered Herbert very little; his explosive beard was still as blond as it had always been, he was as thin as ever, his head showed no signs of going bald. Only his teeth had visibly aged; his smile was discolored and broken.

"But he really ought to go to a dentist," Judith had insistently urged on her sister, the last time they met.

"He doesn't want to," Martha had replied. "He doesn't really believe in them." But perhaps her own reluctance to part with the necessary number of guineas had something to do with Herbert's lack of faith in dentists. "Besides," she went on, "Herbert hardly notices such merely material, physical things. He lives so much in the noumenal world that he's hardly aware of the phenomenal. Really not aware."

"Well, he jolly well ought to be aware," Judith answered, "that's all I can say." She was indignant.

"How are you getting on?" Herbert repeated and laid his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"The bark's most horribly difficult to get right," Paul answered in a complainingly angry voice.

"That makes it all the more worth while to get right," said Herbert. "Patience and work—they're the only things. Do you know how a great man once defined genius?" Paul knew very well how a great man had once defined genius; but the definition seemed to him so stupid and such a personal insult to himself, that he did not answer, only grunted. His father bored him, maddeningly. "Genius," Herbert went on, answering his own question, "genius is aii infinite capacity for taking pains." At that moment Paul detested his father.

"One two-and three-and One-and two-and three-and . . . " Under Sylvia's fingers the mechanical butterflies continued to flap their metal wings. Her face was set, determined, angry; Herbert's great man would have found genius in her. Behind her stiff determined back her mother came and went with a feather brush in her hand, dusting. Time had thickened and coarsened her; she walked heavily. Her hair had begun to go gray. When she had finished dusting, or rather when she was tired of it, she sat down. Sylvia was laboriously cornet-soloing through the dance rhythm. Martha closed her eyes. "Beautiful, beautiful!" she said and

smiled her most beautiful smile. "You play it beautifully, my darling." She was proud of her daughter. Not merely as a musician;"as a human being too. When she thought what trouble she had "had with Sylvia in the old days …"Beautifully." She rose at last and went upstairs to her bedroom. Unlocking a cupboard, she took out a box of candied fruits and ate several cherries, a plum and three apricots. Herbert had gone back to his studio and his unfinished picture of "Europe and America at the feet of Mother India". Paul pulled a catapult out of his pocket, fitted a buckshot into the leather pouch and let fly at a nuthatch that was running like a mouse up the oak tree on the other side of the glade. "Hell!" he said as the bird flew away unharmed. But the next shot was more fortunate. There was a spurt of flying feathers, there were two or three little squeaks. Running up Paul found a hen chaffinch lying in the grass. There was blood on the feathers. Thrilling with a kind of disgusted excitement Paul picked up the little body. How warm. It was the first time he had ever killed anything. What a good shot! But there was nobody he could talk to about it. Sylvia was no good: she was almost worse than Mother about some things. With a fallen branch he scraped a hole and buried the little corpse, for fear somebody might find it and wonder how it had been killed. They'd be furious if they knew! He went into lunch feeling tremendously pleased with himself. But his face fell as he looked round the table. "Only this beastly cold stuff.?"

"Paul, Paul," said his father reproachfully.

"Where's Mother?"

"She's not eating today," Herbert answered.

"All the same," Paul grumbled under his breath, "she really might have taken the trouble to make something hot for us."

Sylvia meanwhile sat without raising her eyes from her plate of potato salad, eating in silence.

Notes

1. **the common** — area (usually in or near a village) of unfenced grassland {or all to use; the implications here are, first, that the Claxtons did not have to pay for the plot of land on which their house was built and, second, that they had no garden of their own.
2. **to make the best of both worlds** — here, the material and spiritual- originally the idiom was used ironically of people who hoped for the best in the next world without making any sacrifices in this one.
3. **Eden** — in the Bible, the first home of Adam and Eve; Paradise. Also called "Garden of Eden".
4. **The meat of the Pig** (meaning the bacon that Sylvia stole) — stands here for the free in the phrase "The tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil" in the Bible.
5. **took his colour** — here, he adapted himself to the circumstances, never objecting openly to being treated as he was treated by his parents.
6. **Inadequately tipped** — the sum of money given as a tip to the taxi driver should be 15% of the fare, and in those days sixpence was the smallest tip.
7. **tuppenny** — informal variant of twopenny. The former British silver coins were the shilling (twenty of which made a pound), the two-shilling piece, the half-crown (worth

two shillings and sixpence), and the sixpence. There was also a threepenny bit made of a mixture of copper and brass; it was not round like the other coins but was twelve-sided, The copper coins were the penny (twelve of which made a shilling), the halfpenny and the farthing (worth one-quarter of a penny). The new British metric coins and notes introduced eventually in 1971 are as follows:

coins	**notes**
a halfpenny	a pound note
a penny	a five-pound note
a twopenny piece	a ten-pound note
a fivepenny piece	a twenty-pound note
a tenpenny piece	
a fifty-pence piece	

8. 100 pence = 1 pound
9. **the War** — the First World War (1914-1918).
10. **an expensive boarding-school** — a public school. England has two educational systems. The system based on the public schools is for the rich and prosperous. The state schools are for the poor and the lower middle class.
11. **Three Blind Mice** — a nursery rhyme.

    Three blind mice, see how they run!
    They all ran after the farmer's wife,
    Who cut off their tails with a carving knife,
    Did ever you see such a thing in your life,
    As three blind mice?

12. **Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus (1756—1791)** — Austrian composer of more than 600 works.
13. **The Merry Peasant Coming Home from Work** — a ballad by Franz Schubert (1797—1828), also known as The Happy Farmer because of various translations of the title from German into English.
14. **Giotto** — in full, Giotto di Bondone (1276?—1337?), Florentine painter, architect, and sculptor.
15. **the lass on the ass** — initial teaching books, or easy reading books, begin with texts composed of short words with regular spelling (the cat sat on a mat, etc.}.
16. **Nick Carter and the Michigan Boulevard Murderers** — cheap detective fiction of the beginning of this century, with Nick Carter as the main character.
17. **Christian Scientist** — believer in healing through spiritual means.
18. **Lausanne** — a city of Switzerland, in the west of the northern shore of Lake of Geneva.
19. **Leysin** — a small place in Switzerland.
20. **ahimsa** — an Indian doctrine of nonviolence expressing belief in the sacredness of all living creatures.
21. **Midsummer Night's Dream** — Shakespeare's comedy with nearly all characters very young people, which makes it a favourite choice for amateur juvenile performances.
22. **High Anglicanism** — here, excessive ritualism.
23. **confirmation** — a rite admitting a baptized person to full member-ship in his church, usually at age of 13 to 16.
24. **Buddha** — Buddhism is a religion of eastern and central Asia.
25. **what Jesus said**... — "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" {New Testament, St. Matthew).

26. **Martha and Mary** — from the Bible. Now the two names are used as symbols of the spiritual (Mary) and material (Martha), and are usually preceded by the definite article.
27. **Parsifal** — an opera by Richard Wagner (1813—1883), German poet and composer.
28. **the Magic Flute** — an opera by Mozart.
29. **the Holy Grail** — a cup or chalice in medieval legends, the object for many chivalrous quests.
30. **entr'acte** — Fr. intermission.
31. **Oxford Street** — the busiest shopping street in London.
32. **to Ascot, to Henley, ...the Eton and Harrow match** — these are all traditional sporting events that take place at approximately the same time every year. Ascot (Royal Ascot) is an annual horse-race in mid-June; Henley (the Henley Royal Regatta) takes place in late June; the Eton and Harrow match is an annual cricket week at Lord's in London in late summer.
33. **A little procession of unemployed** — in 1980, the number of the unemployed in Great Britain reached the figure well over 2 million people. The National Unemployed Workers' Movement (N. U. W. M.) was formed in the twenties.
34. **Selfridge's** — the largest store in London, founded in 1909 by an H. G. Selfridge, an American businessman.
35. **Chopin, Frederic Francois (1810—1849)** — Polish pianist and composer of works for piano and orchestra,
36. **In D** — the notes, in order of pitch, are C, D, E, F, G, A, B.
37. **a cornet solo outside a public house** — here, a tune played by a beggar. As begging is not officially allowed in England, a beggar has to pretend to be engaged in some trade; he (or she) may be selling matches, although there may be only one matchbox to offer for sale, or drawing pictures on the pavement, or singing, or playing a musical instrument - often outside a pub — etc. The cap for collecting money is usually put on the ground.
38. **yoga** — a system of exercises to promote control of the body and mind.
39. **auto-suggestion** — in psychology, a term to denote the process by which a person induces self-acceptance of an opinion, belief, etc.
40. **Cascara** — a kind of laxative.
41. **guineas, guinea** — formerly the sum of twenty-one shillings, for which there was neither coin nor banknote, used in stating prices of goods, professional fees, charges, subscriptions, prizes, etc.
42. **noumenal** = phenomenal — spiritual and material, respectful.
43. **a great man** — Charles Dickens in an after-dinner speech said that genius was an infinite capacity for taking pains.

ЧАСТЬ II

A Novice Teacher

Miss Read
(born 1913)

Visitors to her classroom were frequent. Some were inspectors, some were salaried advisers on a particular subject, some students on educational visits and others were friends of the school.

The inspectors and advisers Anna had expected, for her first year of teaching was probationary and she knew that she would be under surveillance but she had not expected so much vigilance.

There was another reason for the spate of callers, she discovered. Elm Hill was only a small part of the great new suburb which sprawled further and further across the fields to the north-west of London. The education authority was hard-pressed to keep pace with the rapid growth of population. New schools, new teachers, and new methods abounded, and the inspectorate was kept busy as well as the builders.

Many young teachers like Anna had been appointed straight from college to keep pace with the growing mass of "pupils and these needed particular supervision. When, as in Anna's case, the building was grossly overcrowded and a new school due to open near by, even more interested officials from head-quarters came to pay visits, and Anna came to view these callers with dismay.

The advisers, she thought, were the most trying. Each, rather naturally, felt that his own particular subject was the most important on the time-table and gave so many suggestions, not only for the classroom work but for out-of-school activities and involved apparatus to be constructed by Anna, that the poor girl felt quite overwhelmed. These zealous people, each riding his own hobby-horse, did not seem to see that Anna faced daily two fearsome foes — too many children and not enough time. True, they were sympathetic, in a perfunctory way, about the difficulties which confronted her, but Anna suspected that overcrowded conditions and pressure of time were such commonplaces to them and their own burning passion consumed them so remorselessly, that they lost all sense of proportion and, as specialists, expected from the hard pressed teachers far more than the latter could possibly give, no matter how willing they might be.

Anna felt at her most helpless when the adviser for arithmetic had had her in her clutches. She had arrived on a morning of torrential rain and wind. One of the classroom windows had defied all efforts to close it, and the roaring wind played havoc with the papers on the children's desks. Rain had spattered in and Anna, much-tried and irritable, had moved some of the desks to the further side of the classroom.

Outside, the cement-mixer rattled merrily and the thud-ding of another machine told of the birth of the new infants' building, scheduled to be opened

next September, in the same field as the present school.

The children were restless and worked uninterestedly at their sum books. The lowest group were having some difficulty in multiplying by five despite Anna's efforts, when the door opened and Miss Birch introduced herself. She looked, more in sorrow than in anger, upon the little band of children plying their pens and struggling with their fives.

"You've done plenty of active work about five, of course?" she asked.

"Of course," echoed Anna. "And in any case, the infant department copes with —".

"The infant department may do," interrupted Miss Birch forcefully, "but I hope you continue that good work."

Anna began, with sinking heart, to submit herself to yet another homily.

"Are they ready to work in the abstract?" continued Miss Birch. "Do they know five? Do they experience five? Have they got a real feeling of fiveness?"

"I think so," Anna faltered, "and in any case they know they've got five fingers on each hand," she added more bravely.

"Ah!" pounced Miss Birch. "They may have — but in a row! Now, I do feel most strongly that they should see five in a pattern, in a cluster, in a five-group, which is automatically flashed into their minds' eye when they hear the number five!" She warmed to her theme and Anna's battered senses began to wander.'

At the back of the room Arnold had his pen poised close to the cheek of his unsuspecting neighbour. Within a minute, Anna knew from bitter experience, he would call his friend and thus impale his victim's cheek on his nib. It was a simple trick which gave the innocent child much pleasure, and there were still a number of gullible classmates who had not yet had the wit to avoid the trap. Two more boys were having a tongue-stretching match, their eyes hideously crossed.

Children whispered, sniggered, fidgeted, copied each other's work, snatched each other's books, and tormented each other's persons in a dozen irritating ways, while Miss Birch's voice rolled remorselessly on. At last, Anna could bear it no longer.

"Excuse me," she said, firmly, and advancing to the front desks gave a fair imitation of Miss Enderby's ear-splitting clapping. Hush fell.

"Get on with your work without a word!" said Anna sharply. "There will be no play for those who talk!"

Meekly, with a martyred air, the children returned to their labours. Miss Birch watched with a reproving eye such heavily repressive methods. Anna could see that she was debating whether she should make some comments on these harsh dicta, so very much in contradiction to her own free activity, but evidently she decided against it, preferring, Anna had no doubt, to make a dignified note, couched in psychological terms, in the report which she would make later on this visit.

With the air of one wishing to change a painful subject for one of agreeable interest Miss Birch opened a leather case and emptied a large number of rings of assorted colour and size upon Anna's table.

"While they're busy," she said, her eyes lighting up with enthusiasm, "I'll explain this simply wonderful method of teaching mathematics. Have you met it?"

Anna confessed that she had not, and secretly viewed the project with the greatest misgiving. There was hardly enough room for a book and a pen on each desk, let alone a mountain of assorted rings, and the thought of the numbers that would fall by accident, or be projected by design, accompanied by their own and their owner's noise, appalled her, but she did her best to look happily responsive.

Later that day in the staff room, Anna was relieved to find that she was not the only one so bedevilled.

At Dover

Nigel Balchin
(1908-1970)

In traveling home from Florence it is usual to go to Pisa, and there to change on to the Rome express. On the particular occasion that I speak of my fellow-traveller was Miss Bradley. She looked like an out-of-work nurse, and I only noticed her because of her surprising ugliness. She was a rather large heavy woman of thirty-five, with a big red nose and steel-framed glasses. It is an important part of this story that I really very much disliked looking at Miss Bradley.

It is equally important that later on when I went to the dining car, Miss Bradley was already seated, and the man who was attending to us placed me opposite her.

If you are English, it is almost impossible to speak Italian or French on these occasions, because the waiters are anxious to practise their English on you. The waiter who served us spoke quite good English. Yet Miss Bradley was determined to order her food in unbelievably bad schoolgirl French, though she was red in the face when she did so, and plainly very ashamed.

I had the greatest difficulty myself in understanding what she said, and the waiter soon gave it up and brought whatever he had ready. One was forced to believe that Miss Bradley was not only very ugly, but very stupid too.

I think we may have exchanged half a dozen words at dinner. It is difficult to dine endlessly opposite somebody without making a few polite sounds. But they were certainly all that we exchanged, and after we left the dining car I did not see Miss Bradley again until we reached Calais.

She was then trying very hard to get out of the train at Calais Town, where we stopped for a moment, and a man was trying equally hard to explain that she must get out at Calais Port.

This time I certainly spoke to Miss Bradley. I said, “It’s the next stop.” And Miss Bradley, with a red face, said, “Oh, I see, thank you.”

And then, when we reached the sea, we really began to know each other, and it was my fault. There were plenty of porters to carry the bags, and I called one from the window of the train without difficulty. But as I got out I saw Miss Bradley standing on the station platform. She had two large very old cardboard suit-cases, one of which seemed to be held together by a thick string.

She was standing there saying “Porter” rather weakly and the stream of porters was dividing round her, and passing her by, looking for richer people.

It was at this moment I went towards her. I am quite sure that if she had been less ugly, I should not have done it. But she was so ugly and she looked so sad and helpless standing there with her baggage tied together with a string, that I was filled with pity – a thing which seldom happens.

I smiled at her with a real and pleasant sense of virtue and said, “My porter can take your cases, if you like.” Miss Bradley turned and looked at me. She was even uglier than I had thought. She thanked me.

My porter unwillingly added her baggage to mine and in a few minutes we found ourselves on board the ship. Our cases were placed side by side, And Miss Bradley and myself were naturally side by side also.

I hope it will be agreed that up to this point I had acted like a gentleman, though perhaps at no great personal sacrifice. Then my usual bad qualities began to take control. In less that ten minutes I realized that Miss Bradley was very dull. With hesitation but continually she talked about nothing and said nothing interesting about it.

I learned that she had been in Italy for two weeks, visiting her sister, who was married to an Italian. She had never been out of England before.

I considered that I should certainly have to see Miss Bradley safely off the boat at Dover and on to her train; and after that there would be no reason, except rudeness, why we should not travel to London together. That meant four hours of it.

I could not face this. So, excusing myself, I went along to the office on board and bought myself a seat on the Golden Arrow.

Miss Bradley was traveling by the ordinary train, so this would mean that we should separate at Dover. We reached Dover without any interruption in Miss Bradley’s flow of conversation. I hired a man to carry our baggage. I had two expensive suit-cases and she had two pieces of ancient cardboard.

Usually passengers to the Golden Arrow are dealt with first, because the train leaves at twenty minutes before the ordinary train. When the boy asked if we were going on the Golden Arrow, I hesitated and said, ”Yes.”

It was too complicated to explain that one of us wasn’t, and in any case it would help Miss Bradley because they would deal with her bags quickly.

As we went towards the hall I explained carefully to her that my train left before hers, but that I would help her with her baggage first. The boy could then take our cases to the right train, and she could sit comfortable in hers until it left.

The boy, of course, had put our cases together, and we went and stood before them. At the proper time the examiner reached us, looked at the four suit-cases in that sharp way which examiners must practise night and morning, and said, "This is all yours?"

I was not quite sure whether he was speaking to me, or me and Miss Bradley who was standing slightly behind me, and I was just about to say "Yes" for both of us. But suddenly the worst bits of pride in my nature rose to the surface. I did not want to admit that those terrible old cardboard suit-cases were mine, and I replied, "Well, mine and this lady's."

The examiner said, "But you are together?"

"For the present time," I said rather foolishly, smiling at Miss Bradley. I did not want to hurt her feelings.

"Yes," said the examiner patiently. "But are you traveling together? Does this baggage belong to both of you?"

"Well, no, not exactly. We are just sharing a porter."

"Then if you will show me which are your things," said the examiner very slowly and carefully, as if he were talking to a child, "I'll deal with them."

I pointed to my cases. I had nothing valuable and said so. Without asking me to open them. The examiner chalked the cases and then, instead of moving to my left and dealing with Miss Bradley, he moved to the right and began to talk to a man whose baggage covered a space of about seven feet.

Miss Bradley said: "Oh, dear – " mildly. I started to say; "Listen, could you do the lady's too, so that –" but the examiner took no notice of me. He was already examining the man on the right.

The boy swung my cases away, and more were immediately put in the space. The owner gave me a gentle push in the back. I hesitated for a moment but there did not seem to be much advantage in standing there waiting for Miss Bradley when we were about to separate, so I said "Well, I'll say good-bye now, and go to find my train. I expect he'll come back to you next. The porter will bring all our cases to the trains when you have finished. Good-bye."

We shook hands and I left with some relief mixed with a feeling that I was being slightly rude.

I found my seat in the Golden Arrow and began to read. Twenty minutes later I suddenly realized that the train was going to leave in five minutes and that the porter had still not brought my cases. I was just setting off to look for him when he came, breathless, carrying them. I asked him rather sharply what he had been doing.

"It was her," he said shortly.

"Miss Bradley? Well, where is she and where is her baggage?"

“She’s still there,” said the boy in a hard voice. “And will be for some time, I guess. Examining her properly.”

“But why?”

“Well, they have found forty watches when I came away, and that is only the start. So I thought maybe you wouldn’t want me to wait.”

The sad part of the story is this: if I had been a nicer and kinder person, and more patient, and had really decided to see Miss Bradley safely to London, and if I had not been too proud about her baggage, it would almost certainly have been carelessly passed with mine; or if it had been opened, I should have had some very awkward explaining to do. In fact, I seem to have been rude just in time. But I have often wondered whether, when Miss Bradley stood alone and sad on the station at Calais, she had already chosen me as the person to save her, or whether she was just quietly sure that someone would.

Looking back, I am fairly sure that she chose me, though I have never understood exactly how she did so. I am quite sure she never made the slightest effort to speak to me first or to get to know me.

Return to Kansas City

Irwin Shaw
(1913-1984)

Arline opened the bedroom door and softly went over between the twin beds. The dark shades were down and the late afternoon sun came in only in one or two places along the sides of the window frames, in sharp, thin rays.

Arline looked down at her husband, sleeping under the blankets. His fighter's face with the mashed nose was very peaceful on the pillow and his hair was curled like a baby's and he snored gently. A light sweat stood out on his face. Eddie always sweated. But now when she saw Eddie begin to sweat, it made Arline a little angry.

She stood there, watching the serene, glove-marked face. She sat down on the other bed. She took a handkerchief out of a pocket and dabbed at her eyes. They were dry. She sniffed a little and the tears started. For a moment she cried silently, then she sobbed aloud. In a minute the tears and the sobs were regular, loud in the still room.

Eddie stirred in his bed. He turned over on his side. She saw that he had awakened.

"Oh," Arline wept, "sweet Mother of God."

She knew that Eddie was wide awake listening to her and he knew that she knew it, but he hopefully pretended he hadn't been roused. He even snored experimentally once or twice. Arline's sobs shook her and the mascara ran down her cheeks in straight black lines.

Eddie sighed and turned around and sat up, rubbing his hair with his hands.

«What's the matter?" he asked. "What's bothering, you, Arline?"

"Nothing," Arline sobbed.

"If nothing's the matter," Eddie said midly, "what're you crying for?"

Arline didn't say anything. She stopped sobbing aloud and turned the grief inward upon herself and wept bitterly, in silence. Eddie wiped his eyes.

"There are six rooms in this house, Arline darling," he said. "If you have to cry, why is it necessary to pick the exact room where I am sleeping?"

Arline's head sank low on her breast, her beautiful beauty-shop straw-coloured hair falling tragically over her face. "You don't care," she murmured, "you don't care one dime's worth if I break my heart." The tears ran down her wrist.

"I care," Eddie said. He looked unhappily across at his wife, sitting on the other bed, sorrow and despair in every line of her. "Honest, Arline, I care." He went over and sat next to her on the bed and put his arm around her. "Baby," he said. "Now, baby."

She just sat there crying silently, her round soft shoulders shaking now and then under his arm. Eddie began to feel more and more uncomfortable. He squeezed her shoulders two or three times, exhausting his methods of consolation. "Well," he said finally, "I think maybe I'll put the kid in the carriage and take him for a walk. A little air. Maybe when I come back you'll feel better."

"I won't feel better," Arline promised him, without moving. "I won't feel one ounce better. The kid." She sat up erect now and looked at him. "If you paid as much attention to me as to the kid."

"I pay equal attention. My wife and my kid." Eddie stood up and padded around the room uneasily in the socks. Arline watched him intently.

"The male sleeping beauty,'" she said. "The long-distance sleeping champion. You sleep fifteen hours a day," Arline said. "Is it natural?"

"I had a hard workout this morning," Eddie said. "I went six fast rounds. I got to get rest. I got to store up my energy. I am not so young as some people any more. I got to take care of myself. Don't I have to store up energy?"

"Store up your energy!" Arline said loudly. "All day long you store up energy. What is your wife supposed to do when you are storing up energy?"

"You ought to have friends," Eddie suggested without hope. “Why don't you go out with them?"

"They're in Kansas City," Arline said. "My mother, my sisters and my brothers are there. I went to high school in Kansas City. Here I am, in Brooklyn, New York."

"You were in Kansas City two and a half months ago."

"Two and a half months are a long time," Arline said, still weeping. "A person can die in two and a half months. Mama writes she wants to see the baby again. After all, that is natural, a grandmother wants to see her grandchild. Tell me, is it unnatural?"

"No," said Eddie, "It is not unnatural. If Mama wants to see the baby, explain to me why she can't come here. Kindly explain to me."

"My husband is of the opinion that they are handing out gold pieces with movie tickets, in Kansas City," Arline said with cold sarcasm.

"Huh?" Eddie asked, honestly puzzled. "What did you say?"

"How can Mama afford to come here?" Arline asked. "After all, you know, there are no great prizefighters in our family. I had to marry to bring one into the family. Oh, my God!" Once more she wept.

"Listen, Arline." Eddie ran over to her and spoke pleadingly, his tough, battered face very gentle and sad. "I can't afford to have you go to Kansas City every time I take a nap in the afternoon. We have been married a year and a half and you have gone to Kansas City five times. I feel like I am fighting for the New York Central Railroad, Arline!"

Arline shook her head obstinately. "There is nothing to do in New York," she said.

"There is nothing to do in New York!" Eddie's mouth opened in surprise. "My God! There's something to do in Kansas City?" he cried. "What the hell is there to do in Kansas City? Remember, I have been in that town myself. I married you in that town."

"I didn't know how it was going to be," Arline said flatly. "It was nice in Kansas City. I was an innocent young girl."

"Please," said Eddie. "Let us not rake up the past." '

"I was surrounded by my family," Arline went on shakily. "I went to high school there."

She bent over and grief took possession once more. Eddie licked his lips uncomfortably. They were dry from the morning's workout and the lower lip was split a little and smarted when he ran his tongue over it. He searched his brain for a helpful phrase.

"The kid," he ventured timidly, "why don't you play more with the kid?"

"The kid!" Arline cried defiantly. "I take very good care of the kid. I have to stay in every night minding the kid while you are busy storing up your energy." The phrase enraged her and she stood up, waving her arms. "What a business! You fight thirty minutes a month, you got to sleep three hundred and fifty hours. Why, it's laughable. It is very laughable! You are some fighter!" She shook her fist at him in derision. "With all the energy you store up you ought to be able to beat the German Army!"

"That is the business I am in," Eddie tried to explain gently. "That is the nature of my profession."

"Don't tell me that!" Arline said. "I have gone out with other fighters. They don't sleep all the time."

"I am not interested," Eddie said. "I do not want to hear anything about your life before our marriage."

"They go to night clubs," Arline went on irresistibly, "and they dance and they take a drink once in a while and they take a girl to see a musical show!"

Eddie nodded. "They are after something," he said. "That is the whole

story. I meet the type of fighter you mention, too," Eddie said, "The night-club boys. They knock my head off for three rounds and then they start breathing through the mouth. By the time I get through with them they are storing up energy, flat on their backs. With five thousand people watching them. You want me to be that kind of a fighter?"

"You're wonderful," Arline said, wrinkling her nose, sneering. "Big-Purse Eddie Megaffin. I don't notice you bringing back a million dollars."

"I am progressing slowly," Eddie said, looking at the picture of Mary and Jesus over his bed. "I am planning for the future."

"I am linked for life to a goddamn health-enthusiast," Arline said despairingly.

"Why do you talk like that, Arline?"

"Because I want to be in Kansas City," she wailed. "I'm lonesome," Arline wept with true bitterness. "I'm awful lonesome. I'm only twenty-one years old, Eddie."

Eddie patted her gently on the shoulder. "Look, Arline." He tried to make his voice very warm and at the same time logical. "If you would only go easy. If you would go by coach and not buy presents for everybody, maybe I can borrow a coupla bucks and swing it."

"I would rather die," Arline said. "I would rather never see Kansas City again for the rest of my life than let them know my husband has to watch pennies like a streetcar conductor. A man with his name in the papers every week. It would be shameful!"

"But, Arline, darling"- Eddie's face was tortured-"you go four times a year, you buy a lot of presents and you always buy new clothes..."

"I can't appear in Kansas City in rags!"

"Some day, darling," Eddie interrupted. "We're working up. Right now I can't."

"You can!" Arline said. "You're lying to me, Eddie Megaffin. Jake Blucher called up this morning and he told me he offered you a thousand dollars to fight Joe Principe."

Eddie sat down in a chair. He looked down at the floor, understanding why Arline had picked this particular afternoon.

"You would come out of that fight with seven hundred and fifty dollars." Arline's voice was soft and inviting."

"Joe Principe will knock my ears off."

Arline sighed. "I am so anxious to see my mother. She is an old woman and soon she will die."

"At this stage," Eddie said slowly, "I'm not ready for Joe Principe. He is too strong and too smart for me."

"Jake Blucher told me he thought you had a wonderful chance."

"I have a wonderful chance to land in the hospital," Eddie said. "That Joe Principe is made out of springs and cement. If you gave him a pair of horns, it

would be legal to kill him with a sword."

"He is only a man with two fists just like you," Arline said. “You're always telling me how good you are."

"In two years," Eddie said, "taking it very easy and careful, making sure I don't get knocked apart..."

"You could make the money easy!" Arline pointed her finger dramatically at him. "You just don't want to. You don't want me to be happy. I see through you, Eddie Megaffin!"

"I just don't want to get beaten up," Eddie said, shaking his head.

"A fine fighter!" Arline laughed. "What kind of fighter are you, anyhow? A fighter is supposed to get beaten up, isn't he? You don't care for me. All you wanted was somebody to give you a kid and cook your goddamn steaks and lamb chops. I got to stay in a lousy little house day in and... "

"I'll take you to the movies to-night," Eddie promised.

"I don't want to go to the movies. I want to go to Kansas City." Arline threw herself face down on the bed and sobbed. "I'm caught! You don't love me! You won't let me go to people who love me! Mama! Mama!"

Eddie closed his eyes in pain. "I love you," he said, meaning it. "I swear to God."

"You say it." Her voice was smothered in the pillow. "But you don't prove it! Prove it! I never knew a young man could be so stingy. Prove it ..." The words trailed off in sorrow.

Eddie went over and bent down to kiss her. She shook her shoulders to send him away and cried in a heartbroken way. From the next room came the baby’s wailing. "O.K.," Eddie said. "I'll call Blucher."

Arline stopped crying. The baby still wailed in the next room.

"I'll try to raise him to twelve hundred," Eddie said. "You can go to Kansas City.”

Arline sat up and nodded. "I'll write Mama right away," she said.

“Take the kid out for a walk, will you?" Eddie said, as Arline started repairing her face before the mirror. "I want to take a little nap."

"Sure," Arline said, "sure, Eddie."

Eddie took off his shoes and lay down on the bed to start storing up his energy.

Who Is to Be Condemned?

Evan Hunter
(1926-2005)

Richard Dadier was a new teacher, a teacher of English in a vocational high school. He examined his program with more than a curious interest, and after he'd studied it he could not but admit it was fair and a good one, in fact a better one than he had hoped for.

The program was divided into eight forty-five-minute periods. There was five minutes allowed between each period for change of classes, and fifteen minutes allowed at the beginning of the day for his official class. All told, he reported for work at 8.30 a.m., and his day ended at 3.25 p.m. A short day, even counting the lesson plans that would have to be prepared at night in his own time, and even counting the traveling time, and even allowing for the fact that he'd have to be at school by about 8.15 and wouldn't leave, most likely, until 4.00. Even so, it was a short day.

He did not realize that his program was the worst one distributed in the English Department.

He sat at the desk quietly, looking out over the empty classroom. When the voice came from the doorway, it startled him.

"Makes you feel good, doesn't it?"

He looked toward the door and the voice and recognized the new teacher Stanley had introduced him to earlier that day. The man was small and meek-looking, with intense brown eyes and heavy spectacles. Something burned in these big brown eyes now, and there was a smile on his round wide face Rick tried to think of his name but he couldn't remember it. He felt a little embarrassed, too, at having been caught staring out over an empty classroom. He almost resented the small, beaming man's intrusion.

"Yes," he said, trying to sound less frigid than he felt. "It makes you feel good."

The small man walked into the room, still beaming, as if Rick's words had somehow served as an invitation and as if he wouldn't have considered entering if Rick hadn't spoken those words.

"I didn't think it would affect me that way," the small man said. "I mean, you know, it's just a job."

"Yes," Rick said. He estimated the new teacher to be about twenty-eight or so, and he wished he could remember the fellow's name. Hell of a thing not knowing whom you were talking to.

"But the minute I stepped into my room, I felt differently about it. Like reaching a goal, you know? Like - like here I am."

The small man's grin widened. "Damn, if I don't feel good!" Some of the small man's enthusiasm was beginning to rub off on Rick, despite his earlier resentment. "I'm afraid I've forgotten your name," he said. "Edwards," the small man said. "Joshua Edwards. My God, I'm excited. Are you excited?"

"Yes, in a way."

"Well, I can't remember ever being so excited. Well, I can hardly stand still. Have you ever taught before?" Joshua asked.

"No. Just student teaching."

"Me, too. My God, I can't wait till Monday. You think we'll have trouble?"

"I doubt it," Rick said. "I'm just going to get up there and teach."

On Monday Richard entered the building at 8.15, punched the time-clock

with a curious sense of efficiency, and then gathered up his roll-book and walked confidently toward the auditorium, smiling at several students he passed in the hallway. His confidence momentarily wavered when he entered the high-ceilinged, student-filled room and heard what he considered an unruly murmur of many voices. He figured, however, that this was the customary exchange of summer experiences between the students, and he imagined the same murmur would be filling the auditorium of every academic high school in the city on this first day of school. He walked to the left side of the large room, and then down the aisle, where the teachers seemed to be congregated up front, near the piano. He found Josh Edwards sitting up front, his hands clenching and unclenching nervously on his roll-book.

“When do we start?" Josh wanted to know. Rick shrugged. Now that the moment was actually there, he felt no real excitement. He chatted quietly with Josh until it was Josh's turn to call up his class, a fourth-term group. When Josh had left, Rick sat impatiently in his seat, almost dozing. When he heard Halloran call out his name, he picked up his roll-book and his briefcase, walked quickly to the steps, and mounted them with his shoulders back and his head high. He paused dramatically for a moment and then began calling the roll in his best Sir Laurence Olivier voice, on and on, until he flipped over the last card in the book. There had not been a murmur while he spoke, and he was satisfied that he had been accorded the respect due an English high-school teacher. He slapped the roll-book shut and walked down the steps and then into the center aisle, conscious of the curious eyes of the kids upon him.

When he reached his official class, the same curiosity was reflected in their eyes.

"Follow me," he said, unsmiling. "No talking on the way up." That, he figured, was the correct approach. Let them know who is boss right from the start.

"Hey, teach[4]," one of the boys said, "what did Mr. Halloran say your name was?"

Richard turned his head sharply. The boy who had spoken was blond, and there was a vacuous smile on his face, and the smile did not quite reach his eyes.

"I said no talking, and I meant it," Rick snapped.

He walked along ahead of his class, feeling excitement within him now, feeling the same excitement he'd felt when he got the job, only greater now, stronger. He felt in complete control of the situation, and yet there was this raging excitement within him, as if there was something he had to do and he simply could not wait to get it done.

He led the class to the stairwell, and aside from a few whispers here and there, they were very orderly, and he felt that everything was going well. He could hardly contain the excitement within him. When they reached the door to Room 206, he inserted the key expertly, twisted it, removed it, and then pushed the door back.

"Sit anywhere," he said brusquely. "We'll arrange seating later."

The boys filed in, still curious and wondering what sort of duck this new bird was. They seated themselves quickly and quietly, and Rick thought, this is going even better than I expected.

He walked rapidly to his desk, pulled out his chair, but did not sit. He looked out over the faces in the seats before him, and then sniffed the air authoritatively. He raised one eyebrow and glanced at the windows. Then he turned and pointed to a Negro boy sitting up front near his desk. "What's your name?" he asked.

The boy was scared, as if he had been guilty of something he hadn't done. "Me?"

"Yes, what's your name?"

"Dover; I didn't do nothin', teach. Jeez ..."

"Open some of the windows in here, Dover. It's a little stuffy.'"

Dover smiled, his lips pulling back over bright white teeth. He got up from his seat, and Rick congratulated himself on having handled that perfectly. He had not simply given an order which would have resulted in a mad scramble to the windows. He had first chosen one of the boys, and then given the order. All according to the book: damn, if things weren't going fine.

He turned and walked to the blackboard, located a piece of chalk on the runner and wrote his name in big letters on the black surface. MR. DADIER

"That's my name," he said. "In case you missed it in the auditorium." He paused. "Mr. Dad-ee-yay," he pronounced clearly. “We might as well get a few things straight right this minute. First, I want you to fill out Delaney cards (i.e. special forms for school statistics). While you are doing that, I'll tell you what it's going to be like in my classroom." He swung his briefcase up onto the desk-top, reaching inside for the stack of Delaney cards. He took them to the head of each row, giving a small bunch of the cards to the first boy in each row and asking him to take one and pass the rest back.

"The official class is 27," he said, and then he walked to the blackboard and wrote '27' under his name. "Please fill the cards out in ink."

"I ain't got a pen or a pencil," said Dover.

"1 have some," Rick said coldly. He walked back to his briefcase again, silently congratulating himself upon remembering to think of an emergency like this one. He pulled out eight sharpened pencils, handed one to Dover, and then asked, "Does anyone else need something to write with?"

A husky boy sitting near the back of the room said, "I do, teach."

"Let's knock off this 'teach' business right now," Rick said angrily, his sudden fury surprising the class. "My name is Mr. Dadier. You'II call me that, or you'll learn what extra homework is."

"Sure, Mr. Dadier," the boy at the back of the room said.

"Come and get your pencil."

The boy rose nonchalantly. He was older than the other boys, and Rick

spotted him immediately as a trouble-maker. The boy wore a white shirt and tight trousers. He kept his hands in his back hip pockets, and he strode to the front of the room, taking the pencil gingerly from Rick's hand.

"Thanks, teach," he said smiling.

"What's your name?" Rick asked.

"Sullivan," the boy said smiling. His hair was red, and a spatter of freckles crossed the bridge of his nose. He had a pleasant smile, and pleasant green eyes.

"How would you like to visit me after school is out today, Sullivan?"

"I wouldn't," the boy answered, still smiling.

"Then learn how to use my name."

"Sure," Sullivan said.

He smiled again, a broad, insolent smile, and then turned his back on Rick, walking lazily to his seat at the rear of the room.

"I want those pencils returned," Rick said gruffly, feeling he had lost some ground in the encounter with Sullivan. "Fill out the cards as quickly as you can."

Rick remembered Bob Canning, who had graduated from Hunter the semester before him, and who had taught in a vocational school, only to leave the job after five months. Bob had allowed the boys to call him 'Bob', a real1 nice friendly gesture. The boys had all just loved good old Bob. The boys loved good old Bob so much that they waited for him on his way home one night, and beat him up and stabbed him down the length of his arm. Good old bleeding 'Bob'. Rick would not make the same mistake.

He remembered something he'd been told back in one of his education classes, something about giving the difficult boys in the class things to do, like raising windows and cleaning blackboards and erasers, or running errands. Dover did not seem to be a difficult boy, and perhaps he'd been wrong in giving him the window assignment. He remembered then that someone had to bring down the list of absentees each morning, and he decided Sullivan, his good friend in the rear of the room, was the ideal man for the job.

"Sullivan," he said, looking directly at the boy, "you will take down the roll-book every morning."

"Sure," Sullivan said, smiling as if he'd won a major victory.

Sullivan's attitude puzzled Rick, but he decided not to let it bother him. He picked a blond boy in the third row and said, "Will you collect the Delaney cards, please?"

"Sure, teach," the boy said.

"What's your name?" Rick asked him.

"Me?"

The answer irritated him a little, but that was because he did not yet know "Me?" was a standard answer at Manual Trades High School, where a boy always thought he had done something bad even if he were completely innocent.

"Yes," Rick said, "you."

"Foster, teach."

"Mr. Dadier," Rick corrected.
"Oh, yeah. Sure."
"Hurry up with those cards, Foster."
"Sure, teach."

The Moon's a Balloon

David Niven*
(1910-1983)

In the summer of 1926, by now a robust sixteen-year-old and appreciably ahead of my time in worldly experience, Roxburgh must have sensed a change in me'. He sent for me and told me that I was one of four boys he had selected to become "monitors" in a new house - Grafton, which was to open the following term.

The housemaster was coming from Fettes, Mr. Freeman, and the boy chosen as prefect or head of the house was Bernard Gadney. It was a huge compliment for any boy, but for me to feel that J. F. Roxburgh had this faith in me was an enormous boost. However, before I could bask in the glories of my new responsibilities, I had to overcome a slight hazard – the School Certificate. I was to sit for the exam in two weeks' time. It was a sort of long shot really ... if I failed this first time, I would still have three more chances but I had to obtain the certificate soon in order to qualify to sit for the entrance exam to the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, eighteen months hence.

Apart from the dreaded mathematics, I was quite confident that I could pull it off this first time. My prospects in the new house were very exciting, my fat had disappeared, I had many friends at school and at Bembridge, I had Nessie in the background and I was at least beginning to get to know and to love my mother. In fact, everything was "roses" for me. Then that damn wind started puffing those weeds in my direction once more.

I sat for the exam in the big school gymnasium and made mincemeat of the first two papers, French and history, and after the science, geography and English papers, I remained supremely confident. The last two tests were mathematics and Latin translation. In mathematics, as already explained, a "credit" (about 80 per cent) was obligatory; without it, I would fail in the whole exam. When the questions were put on my desk, and all over the country at that particular moment identical papers were being put in front of thousands of nervous boys, I took a deep breath and started to read.

One glance was enough. It was hopeless. I knew that I just couldn't cope and there is no more suffocating feeling when sitting for a public examination.

I made a few vague stabs at the geometry questions and a token effort at the algebra but there was no point in my even trying to tackle the arithmetic.

I was the first boy to hand in his answers and leave the gymnasium. I went out to the cricket nets and faced the fact that the School Certificate was certainly

not going to be mine this time.

Nessie was coming to see me the next day - a Saturday - and her train was due at Buckingham Station at midday. The Latin exam was scheduled from ten o'clock till eleven-thirty, so I decided to get through this now useless and unprofitable period as quickly as possible, pedal down to the station and surprise her there instead of meeting her as planned near the Corinthian arch at twelve-thirty.

It so happened that my Latin teacher was the supervisor of the candidates on that Saturday morning, which meant that it was he who would hand out the questions at the start, collect the answers at the end and in between, wander about the rows of desks making sure that there was no talking, or, perish the thought, any use of notes.

He knew that I could easily pass the Latin exam but only I knew that it was now useless to try.

The trick then was to complete the whole paper in half the time and be on my way to Buckingham Station. Archie Montgomery-Campbell was a good and outstanding friend who occupied the desk on my right during the whole week of exams. He was also an excellent Latin scholar, so I enlisted his help.

The Latin paper was in two parts, prose and verse. It was agreed that I would quickly dispose of the prose while Archie coped first with the verse. Then, after making his fair copy, he would crumple up his first draft and drop it on the floor between the two desks. It was clearly understood between us that if anything went wrong, Archie would merely say that he had thrown away his first translation after he had made his fair copy and if somebody picked it up, it was none of his business. The dirty work was to be done by me alone; he was to be blameless.

It all went beautifully according to plan. I copied out Archie's verse translation beneath my own effort at the prose, handed in my paper, and bicycled happily off in plenty of time to surprise Nessie.

In chapel about three weeks after Nessie's visit, J. F. motioned the boys to remain in their places. An expectant murmur arose.

"All over the country," J. F. began, "overworked examiners have been correcting several thousand papers sent in for this year's School Certificate examinations.

"Stowe is a new school and these same examiners have been looking at the papers sent in by us with special interest.

"Boys who sit for a public examination are representing their schools in public and they, therefore, have a very great responsibility. Schools are judged by the boys who represent them. It is, therefore, with grief and great disappointment that I have to tell you that two boys representing Stowe in the School Certificate have been caught cheating. I shall question the two concerned this evening and I shall deal with them as I see fit."

Only when I saw Archie Montgomery-Campbell's ashen face did the

horrible truth sink in. As the school rose to leave the chapel, my legs turned to water.

Poor Archie was the first to be summoned to the Headmaster's study. A quarter of an hour later, I was located near the lavatories where I had been spending the interim.

No smile on J. F.'s face this time, just a single terse question, "Have you anything to say for yourself?"

For the lack of any flash of genius that might have saved me, I told him the truth - that I had failed the exam anyway and wanted to get out early. I also added that Archie was completely guiltless and stood to gain nothing by helping me.

J. F. stared at me in silence for a long time, then he crossed the quiet, beautifully furnished room and stood looking out of the open french windows into the flower garden where he had first interviewed me. Cheating in a public examination is a crime and it seemed inevitable that I would be expelled. I braced myself for the news as he turned towards me.

"Montgomery-Campbell made a stupid mistake in helping you with your Latin translation and I have given him six strokes of the cane. Until you stood there and told me the truth, I had every intention of expelling you from the school. However, in spite of your very gross misbehaviour, I still have faith in you and I shall keep you at Stowe. Now, I propose to give you twelve strokes of the cane."

My joy at not being thrown out was quickly erased by the thought of my short-term prospect... Twelve! That was terrifying! J. F. was a powerfully built man and his beatings, though rare, were legendary.

"Go next door into the Gothic Library. Lift your coat, bend over and hold on to the bookcase by the door. It will hurt you very much indeed. When it is over, and I expect you make no noise, go through the door as quickly as you wish. When you feel like it, go back to your house."

The first three or four strokes hurt so much that the shock somehow cushioned the next three or four, but the last strokes of my punishment were unforgettable. I don't believe I did make any noise, not because I was told to avoid doing so, or because I was brave or anything, like that - it hurt so much. I just couldn't get my breath.

When the bombardment finally stopped, I flung open the door and shot out into the passage. Holding my behind and trumpeting like a rogue elephant, down the stone passage, past the boiler rooms I went, out into the summer evening and headed for the woods.

After the pain subsided, the mortification set in. How was I going to face the other boys - a cheat? Obviously, my promised promotion to monitor would be cancelled and my remaining time at Stowe would be spent as an outcast.

I determined there and then that, somehow, I would repay J. F. I never could, of course, but I became, I think, a good and responsible monitor for the

next term and, in due course, after squeaking past a mathematical barrier, I passed into the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, and became one of the first three Stowe boys to gain commissions in the Regular Army.

David Niven is a popular Hollywood star of the 40-60-ies. He has won a number of awards, the Oscar included. During World War II he had a distinguished career as a reconnaissance officer. His autobiographical bestseller "The Moon's a Balloon" (1971) brought him recognition as a writer and a witty story teller.

Gloria

Scott Fitzgerald
(from The Beautiful and the Damned)

The management of Gloria's temper, whether it was aroused by a lack of hot water for her bath or by a skirmish with her husband, became almost the primary duty of Anthony's day. It must be done just so — by this much silence, by that much pressure, by this much yielding, by that much force. It was in her angers with their attendant cruelties that her inordinate egotism chiefly displayed itself. Because she was brave, because she was "spoiled", because of her outrageous and commendable independence of judgement; and finally because of her arrogant consciousness that she had never seen a girl as beautiful as herself, Gloria had developed into a consistent, practising Nietzschean.[1] This, of course, with overtones of profound sentiment.

There was, for example, her stomach. She was used to certain dishes, and she had a strong conviction that she could not possibly eat anything else. There must be a lemonade and a tomato sandwich late in the morning, then a light lunch with a stuffed tomato. Not only did she require food from a selection of a dozen dishes, but in addition this food must be prepared in just a certain way. One of the most annoying half hours in the first fortnight occurred in Los Angeles, when an unhappy waiter brought her a tomato stuffed with chicken salad instead of celery.

“We always serve it that way, madame," he quavered to the gray eyes that regarded him wrathfully.

Gloria made no answer, but when the waiter had turned discreetly away she banged both fists upon the table until the china and silver rattled.

“Poor Gloria!” laughed Anthony unwittingly, "you can't get what you want ever, can you?"

“I can't eat stuff!" she flared up.

“I’ll call back the waiter."

"I don't want you to! He doesn't know anything, the darn fool!"

"Well, it isn't the hotel's fault. Either send it back, forget it, or be a sport and eat it."

“Shut up" she said succinctly.

“Why take it out on me?"

“Oh, I’m not,” she wailed, "but I simply can't eat it."

Anthony subsided helplessly.

"We'll go somewhere else," he suggested.

"I don't want to go anywhere else. I'm tired of being trotted around to a dozen cafes and not getting one thing fit to eat."

"When did we go around to a dozen cafes?"

"You'd have to in this town," insisted Gloria with ready sophistry. Anthony, bewildered, tried another tack.

"Why don't you try to eat it? It can't be as bad as you think."

"Just — because — I — don't — like — chicken!"

She picked up her fork and began poking contemptuously at the tomato, and Anthony expected her to begin flinging the stuffings in all directions. He was sure that she was approximately as angry as she had ever been — for an instant he had detected a spark of hate directed as much toward him as toward any one else — and Gloria angry was, for the present, unapproachable.

Then, surprisingly, he saw that she had tentatively raised the fork to her lips and tasted the chicken salad. Her frown had not abated[2] and he stared at her anxiously, making no comment and daring scarcely to breathe. She tasted another forkful — in another moment she was eating. With difficulty Anthony restrained a chuckle; when at length he spoke his words had no possible connection with chicken salad.

This incident, with variations, ran like a lugubrious fugue[3] through the first year of marriage; always it left Anthony baffled, irritated, and depressed. But another rough brushing of temperaments, a question of laundry bags, he found even more annoying as it ended inevitably in a decisive defeat for him.

One afternoon in Coronado,[4] where they made the longest stay of their trip, more than three weeks, Gloria was arraying herself brilliantly for tea. Anthony, who had been downstairs listening to the latest rumor bulletins of war in Europe, entered the room, kissed the back of her powdered neck, and went to his dresser. After a great pulling out and pushing in of drawers, evidently unsatisfactory, he turned around to the Unfinished Masterpiece.[5]

"Got any handkerchiefs, Gloria?" he asked.

Gloria shook her golden head.

"Not a one. I'm using one of yours."

"The last one, I deduce." He laughed dryly.

"Is it?" She applied an emphatic though very delicate contour to her lips."Isn't the laundry back?"

“I don't know."

Anthony hesitated — then, with sudden discernment, opened the closet door. His suspicions were verified. On the hook provided hung the blue bag furnished by the hotel. This was full of his clothes — he had put them there himself. The floor beneath it was littered with an astonishing mass of finery —

lingerie, stockings, dresses, nightgowns, and pajamas - most of it scarcely worn but all of it coming indubitably under the general heading of Gloria's laundry.

He stood holding the closet door open.

“Why, Gloria!"

“What?"

The lip line was being erased and corrected according to some mysterious perspective; not a finger trembled as she manipulated the lip-stick, not a glance wavered in his direction. It was a triumph of concentration.“Haven't you ever sent out the laundry?"

“Is it there?"

“It most certainly is. Well, I guess I haven't, then."

“Gloria," began Anthony, sitting down on the bed and trying to catch her mirrored eyes[6], "you're a nice fellow, you are! I’ve sent it out every time it's been sent since we left New York, and over a week ago you promised you'd do it for a change. All you'd have to do would be to cram your own junk into that bag and ring for the chambermaid."

“Oh, why fuss about the laundry?" exclaimed Gloria petulantly, "I'll take care of it."

“I haven't fussed about it. I'd just as soon divide the bother with you, but when we run out of handkerchiefs it's darn near time something's done."

Anthony considered that he was being extraordinarily logical. But Gloria, unimpressed, put away her cosmetics and casually offered him her back.

“Hook me up,"[7] she suggested; "Anthony, dearest, I forgot about it. I meant to, honestly, and I will to-day. Don't be cross with your sweetheart."

What could Anthony do then but draw her down upon and kiss a shade of colour from her lips.

“But I don't mind," she murmured with a smile, radiant and magnanimous. "You can kiss all the paint off my lips any time you want."

They went down to tea. They bought some handkerchiefs in a notion store[8] near by. All was forgotten.

But two days later Anthony looked in the closet and saw that the bag still hung limp[9] upon its hook and that the gay and vivid pile on the floor had increased surprisingly in height.

"Gloria!" he cried.

"Oh — Her voice was full of real distress. Despairingly[10] Anthony went to the phone and called the chambermaid.

"It seems to me," he said impatiently, "that you expect me to be some sort of French valet to you."

Gloria laughed so infectiously that Anthony was unwise enough to smile. Unfortunate man! In some intangible manner his smile made her mistress of the situation — with an air of injured righteousness she went emphatically to the closet and began pushing her laundry violently into the bag. Anthony watched her — ashamed of himself.

"There!" she said, implying that her fingers had been worked to the bone by a brutal taskmaster.

He considered, nevertheless, that he had given her an object-lesson and that the matter was closed, but on the contrary it was merely beginning. Laundry pile followed laundry pile — at long intervals; dearth of handkerchief followed dearth of handkerchief — at short ones; not to mention dearth of sock, of shirt, of everything. And Anthony found at length that either he must send it out himself or go through the increasingly unpleasant ordeal of a verbal battle with Gloria.

Notes

1. **practising Nietzschean** (ironical periphr.) — Gloria practically applied Nietzsche's doctrine of the development of the superman, a superior being characterized by physical perfection, capacity for power, and a moral nature beyond good and evil, as the product of evolutionary survival of the fittest. In plain English this means that she considered herself perfect in every possible way and firmly believed she could do whatever she pleased.
2. **abate** (lit. and fig.) — to diminish little by little in intensity, e. g. The storm abated. His irritation did not abate. Syn.: subside—to fall to a low level, to become quiet, e.g. The waves are subsiding.
3. **lugubrious fugue** — a solemn and sad musical composition where a theme is repeated throughout the composition in its various parts
4. **Coronado** [kora'na:dou] — a residential city in South California known for its fine beaches.
5. **Unfinished Masterpiece** (ironical periphr.} — the author refers to Gloria in this way to point out that Gloria, who considered herself to be perfect in every way, had not yet finished making up her face
6. **to catch her mirrored eyes** — to look into her eyes reflected in the mirror (as Gloria was concentrated on putting on the lip-stick and wouldn't so much as glance at him)
7. **Hook me up** — fasten my dress (which hooks at the back)
8. **notion store** (Am.} — a shop where small miscellaneous articles, such as pins, needles, ribbons, etc., are sold
9. **still hung limp** — was still empty or half-full
10. **despairingly** — in despair, hopelessly. Do not confuse with "desperately", which is a synonym to "recklessly", i. e. disregarding the possible risk, danger and the like

My Oedipus Complex[1]

Frank 0'Connor

Father was in the army all through the war — the first war, I mean — so, up to the age of five, I never saw much of him, and what I saw did not worry me. Sometimes I woke and there was a big figure in khaki peering down at me in the candlelight. Sometimes in the early morning I heard the slamming of the front door and the clatter of nailed boots down the cobbles of the lane. These were Father's entrances and exits. Like Santa Claus[2] he came and went mysteriously.

In fact, I rather liked his visits, though it was an uncomfortable squeeze between Mother and him when I got into the big bed in the early morning. He smoked, which gave him a pleasant musty smell, and shaved, an operation of astounding interest. Each time he left a trail of souvenirs — model tanks and Gurkha knives[3] with handles made of bullet cases, and German helmets and cap badges and button-sticks,[4] and all sorts of military equipment — carefully stowed away in a long box on top of the wardrobe, in case they ever came in handy. There was a bit of the magpie about Father;[5] a he expected everything to come in handy. When his back was turned, Mother let me get a chair and rummage through his treasures. She didn't seem to think so highly of them as he did.

The war was the most peaceful period of my life. The window of my attic faced southeast. My Mother had curtained it, but that had small effect. I always woke with the first light and, with all the responsibilities of the previous day melted, feeling myself rather like the sun, ready to illumine and rejoice. Life never seemed so simple and clear and full of possibilities as then. I put my feet out from under the clothes — I called them Mrs Left and Mrs Right — and invented dramatic situations for them in which they discussed the problems of the day. At least Mrs Right did; she was very demonstrative,[6] but I hadn't the same control of Mrs Left, so she mostly contented herself with nodding agreement.

They discussed what Mother and I should do during the day, what Santa Claus should give a fellow for Christmas, and what steps should be taken to brighten the home. There was that little matter of the baby, for instance. Mother and I could never agree about that. Ours was the only house in the terrace without a new baby, and Mother said we couldn't afford one till Father came back from the war because they cost seventeen and six.[7] That showed how simple she was. The Geneys up the road had a baby, and everyone knew they couldn't afford seventeen and six. It was probably a cheap baby, and Mother wanted something really good, but I felt she was too exclusive.[8] The Geneys' baby would have done us fine.[9]

Having settled my plans for the day, I got up, put a chair under the attic window, and lifted the frame high enough to stick out my head. The window overlooked the front gardens of the terrace behind ours, and beyond these it looked over a deep valley to the tall, red-brick houses terraced up the opposite hillside, which were all still in shadow, while those at our side of the valley were all lit up, though with long strange shadows that made them seem unfamiliar; rigid and painted.

After that I went into Mother's room and climbed into the big bed. She woke and I began to tell her of my schemes. By this time, though I never seem to have noticed it, I was petrified[10] in my nightshirt, and I thawed as I talked until, the last frost melted, I fell asleep beside her and woke again only when I heard her below in the kitchen, making the breakfast.

After breakfast we went into town; heard Mass at St.Augustine's[11] and said a prayer for Father, and did the shopping. If the afternoon was fine, we either went for a walk in the country or a visit to Mother's great friend in the convent, Mother St.Dominic. Mother had them all praying for Father, and every night, going to bed, tasked God to send him back safe from the war to us. Little, indeed, did I know what I was praying for!

One morning, I got into the big bed, and there, sure enough, was Father in his usual Santa Claus manner, but later, instead of uniform, he put on his best blue suit, and Mother was as pleased as anything. I saw nothing to be pleased about, because, out of uniform, Father was altogether less interesting, but she only beamed, and explained that our prayers had been answered, and off we went to Mass to thank God for having brought Father safely home.

The irony of it![12] That very day when he came in to dinner he took off his boots and put on his slippers, donned the dirty old cap he wore about the house to save him from colds, crossed his legs, and began to talk gravely to Mother, who looked anxious. Naturally, I disliked her looking anxious, because it destroyed her good looks, so I interrupted him.

"Just a moment, Larry!" she said gently.

This was only what she said when we had boring visitors, so I attached no importance to it and went on talking.

"Do be quiet, Larry!" she said impatiently. "Don't you hear me talking to Daddy?"

This was the first time I had heard these ominous words, "talking to Daddy," and I couldn't help feeling that if this was how God answered, prayers, he couldn't listen to them very attentively.

"Why are you talking to Daddy?" I asked with as great a show of indifference as I could muster.[13]

"Because Daddy and I have business to discuss. Now, don't interrupt again!"

In the afternoon, at Mother's request, Father took me for a walk. This time we went into town instead of out to the country, and I thought at first, in my usual optimistic way, that it might be an improvement. It was nothing of the sort. Father and I had quite different notions of a walk in town. He had no proper interest in trams, ships, and horses, and the only thing that seemed to divert him was talking to fellows as old as himself. When I wanted to stop he simply went on, dragging me behind him by the hand; when he wanted to stop I had no alternative but to do the same. I noticed that it seemed to be a sign that he wanted to stop for a long time whenever he leaned against a wall. The second time I saw him do it I got wild. He-seemed to be settling himself for ever. I pulled him by the coat and trousers, but, unlike Mother who, if you were too persistent, got into a wax[14] and said: "Larry, if you don't behave yourself, I'll give you a good slap," Father had an extraordinary capacity for amiable inattention. I sized him up and wondered would I cry, but he seemed to be too

remote to be annoyed even by that. Really, it was like going for a walk with a mountain! He either ignored the wrenching and pummelling entirely, or else glanced down with a grin of amusement from his peak. I had never met anyone so absorbed in himself as he seemed.

At tea time, "talking to Daddy" began again, complicated this time by the fact that he had an evening paper, and every few minutes he put it down and told Mother something new out of it. I felt this was foul play.[15] Man for man, I was prepared to compete with him any time for Mother's attention, but when he had it all made up for him by other people it left me no chance. Several times I tried to change the subject without success.

"You must be quiet while Daddy is reading, Larry," Mother said impatiently.

It was clear that she either genuinely liked talking to Father better than talking to me, or else that he had some terrible hold on[16] her which made her afraid to admit the truth.

"Mummy," I said that night when she was tucking me up, "do you think if I prayed hard God would send Daddy back to the war?"

She seemed to think about that for a moment.

"No dear," she said with a smile. "I don't think He would."

"Why wouldn't He, Mummy?"

"Because there isn't a war any longer, dear."

"But, Mummy, couldn't God make another war, if He liked?"

"He wouldn't like to, dear. It's not God who makes wars, but bad people."

"Oh!" I said.

I was disappointed about that. I began to think that God wasn't quite what He was cracked up[17] to be.

Next morning I woke at my usual hour, feeling like a bottle of champagne.[18] I put out my feet and invented a long conversation in which Mrs Right talked of the trouble she had with her own father till she put him in the Home.[19] I didn't quite know what the Home was but it sounded the right place for Father. Then I got my chair and stuck my head out of the attic window. Dawn was just breaking, with a guilty air that made me feel I had caught it in the act. My head bursting with stories and schemes, I stumbled in next door, and in the half-darkness scrambled into the big bed. There was no room at Mother's side so I had to get between her and Father. For the time being I had forgotten about him, and for several minutes I sat bolt upright, racking my brains to know what I could do with him. He was taking up more than his fair share of the bed, and I couldn't get comfortable, so I gave him several kicks that made him grunt and stretch. He made room[20] all right, though. Mother waked and felt for me. I settled back comfortably in the warmth of the bed with my thumb in my mouth.

"Mummy!" I hummed, loudly and contentedly.

"Sssh! dear," 'she whispered, "Don't wake Daddy!"

This was a new development, which threatened to be even more serious than "talking to Daddy." Life without my early-morning conferences was unthinkable.

"Why?" I asked severely.

"Because poor Daddy is tired."

This seemed to me a quite inadequate reason, and I was sickened by the sentimentality of her "poor Daddy". I never liked that sort of gush[21]; it always struck me as insincere.

"Oh!" I said lightly. Then in my most winning tone; "Do you know where I want to go with you today, Mummy?"

"No, dear," she sighed.

"I want to go down the Glen and fish for thornybacks[22] with my new net, and then I want to go out to the Fox and Hounds[23], and — "

"Don't-wake-Daddy!" she hissed angrily, clapping her hand across my mouth.

But it was too late. He was awake, or nearly so. He grunted and reached for the matches. Then he stared incredulously at his watch.

"Like a cup of tea, dear?" asked Mother in a meek, hushed voice I had never heard her use before. It sounded almost as though she were afraid.

"Tea?" he exclaimed indignantly. "Do you know what the time is?"

"And after that I want to go up the Rathcooney Road," I said loudly, afraid I'd forget something in all those interruptions.

"Go to sleep at once, Larry!" she said sharply.

I began to snivel. I couldn't concentrate, the way that pair went on, and smothering my early-morning schemes was like burying a family from the cradle.[24]

Father said nothing, but lit his pipe and sucked it, looking out into the shadows without minding Mother or me. I knew he was mad.[25] Every time I made a remark Mother hushed me irritably. I was mortified. I felt it wasn't fair; there was even something sinister in it. Every time I had pointed out to her the waste of making two beds when we could both sleep in one, she had told me it was healthier like that, and now here was this man, this stranger, sleeping with her without the least regard for her health!

He got up early and made tea, but though he brought Mother a cup he brought none for me.

"Mummy," I shouted, "I want a cup of tea, too."

"Yes, dear," she said patiently. "You can drink from Mummy's saucer."

That settled it. Either Father or I would have to leave the house. I didn't want to drink from Mother's saucer; I wanted to be treated as an equal in my own home, so, just to spite her. I drank it all and left none for her. She took that quietly, too.

But that night when she was putting me to bed she said gently: "Larry, I want you to promise me something."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Not to come in and disturb poor Daddy in the morning. Promise?"

"Poor Daddy" again! I was becoming suspicious of everything involving that quite impossible man.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because poor Daddy is worried and tired and he doesn't sleep well."

"Why doesn't he, Mummy?"

"Well, you know, don't you, that while he was at the war Mummy got the pennies from the Post Office?"[26]

"From Miss MacCarthy?"

"That's right. But now, you see, Miss MacCarthy hasn't any more pennies, so Daddy must go out and find us some. You know what would happen if he couldn't?"

"No," I said, "tell us."

"Well, I think we might have to go out and beg for them like the poor old woman on Fridays. We wouldn't like that, would we?"

"No," I agreed. "We wouldn't".

"So you'll promise not to come in and wake him?"

"Promise."

Mind you, I meant that. I knew pennies were a serious matter, and I was all against having to go out and beg like the old woman on Fridays. Mother laid out all my toys in a complete ring round the bed so that, whatever way I got out, I was bound to fall over one of them.

When I woke I remembered my promise all right. I got up and sat on the floor and played—for hours, it seemed to me. Then I got my chair and looked out of the attic window for more hours. I wished it was time for Father to wake; I wished someone would make me a cup of tea. I didn't feel in the least like the sun; instead, I was bored and so very, very cold! I simply longed for the warmth and depth of the big feather-bed.

At last I could stand it no longer. I went into the next room. As there was still no room at Mother's side I climbed over her and she woke with a start.

"Larry," she whispered, gripping my arm very tightly, "what did you promise?"

"But I did, Mummy," I wailed, caught in the very act.[27]

"I was quiet for ever so long."

"Oh, dear, and you're perished!"[28] she said sadly, feeling me all over. "Now, if I let you stay will you promise not to talk?"

"But I want to talk, Mummy," I wailed.

"That has nothing to do with it," she said with a firmness that was new to me. "Daddy wants to sleep.' Now, do you understand that?"

I understood it only too well. I wanted to talk, he wanted to sleep — whose house was it, anyway?

"Mummy," I said with equal firmness, "I think it would be healthier for Daddy to sleep in his own bed."

That seemed to stagger her, because she said nothing for a while.

"Now, once for all," she went on, "you're to be perfectly quiet or go back to your own bed. Which is it to be?"

The injustice of it got me down.[29] I had convicted her out of her own mouth[30] of inconsistency and unreasonableness, and she hadn't even attempted to reply. Full of spite, I gave Father a kick, which she didn't notice but which made him grunt and open his eyes in alarm.

"What time is it?" he asked in a panic-stricken voice, not looking at Mother but at the door, as if he saw someone there.

"It's early yet," she replied soothingly. "It's only the child. Go to sleep again. ...Now, Larry," she added, getting out of bed, "you've wakened Daddy and you must go back."

This time, for all her quiet air, I knew she meant it, and knew that my principal rights and privileges were as good as lost[31] unless I asserted them at once. As she lifted me, I gave a screech, enough to wake the dead, not to mind Father. He groaned.

"That damn child! Doesn't he ever sleep?"

"It's only a habit, dear," she said quietly, though I could see she was vexed.

"Well, it's time he got out of it,"[32] shouted Father, beginning to heave in the bed. He suddenly gathered all the bed-clothes about him, turned to the wall, and then looked back over his shoulder with nothing showing only two small, spiteful, dark eyes. The man looked very wicked.

To open the bedroom door, Mother had to let me down, and I broke free and dashed for the farthest corner, screeching. Father sat bolt upright in bed.

"Shut up, you little puppy!" he said in a choking voice.

I was so astonished that I stopped screeching. Never, never had anyone spoken to me in that tone before. I looked at him incredulously and saw his face convulsed with rage. It was only then that I fully realized how God had codded[33] me, listening to my prayers for the safe return of this monster.

"Shut up, you!" I bawled, beside myself.

"What's that you said?" shouted Father, making a wild leap out of the bed.

"Mick, Mick!" cried Mother. "Don't you see the child isn't used to you?"

"I see he's better fed than taught,"[34] snarled Father, waving his arms wildly. "He wants his bottom smacked."

All his previous shouting was as nothing to these obscene words referring to my person. They really made my blood boil.

"Smack your own!" I screamed hysterically. "Smack your own! Shut up! Shut up!"

At this he lost his patience and let fly at me.[35] He did it with the lack of conviction you'd expect of a man under Mother's horrified eyes, and it ended up

as a mere tap, but the sheer indignity of being struck at all by a stranger, a total stranger who had cajoled his way back from the war into our big bed as a result of my innocent intercession,[36] made me completely dotty.[37] I shrieked, and shrieked, and shrieked, and danced in my bare feet, and Father, looking awkward and hairy in nothing but a short grey army shirt, glared down at me like a mountain out for murder.[38] I think it must have been then that I realized he was jealous too. And there stood Mother in her nightdress, looking as if her heart was broken between us. I hoped she felt as she looked. It seemed to me that she deserved it all.

From that morning on my life was a hell. Father and I were enemies, open and avowed. We conducted a series of skirmishes against one another, he trying to steal my time with Mother and I his. When she was sitting on my bed, telling me a story, he took to looking for some pair of old boots which he alleged he had left[39] behind at the beginning of the war. While he talked to Mother I played loudly with my toys to show my total lack of concern. He created a terrible scene one evening when he came in from work and found me at his box, playing with his regimental badges, Gurkha knives, and button-sticks. Mother got up and took the box from me.

"You mustn't play with Daddy's toys unless he lets you, Larry," she said severely. "Daddy doesn't play with yours."

For some reason Father looked at her as if she had struck him and then turned away with a scowl.

"Those are not toys," he growled, taking down the box again to see if I had lifted anything.[40] Some of those curios are very rare and valuable."

But as time went on I saw more and more how he managed to alienate Mother and me. What made it worse was that I couldn't grasp his method or see what attraction he had for Mother. In every possible way he was less winning than I. He had a common accent and made noises at his tea. I thought for a while that it might be the newspapers she was interested in, so I made up bits of news of my own to read to her. Then I thought it might be the smoking, which I personally thought attractive, and took his pipes and went round the house dribbling into them till he caught me. I even made noises at my tea, but Mother only told me I was disgusting. It all seemed to hinge round that unhealthy habit of sleeping together, so I made a point of dropping into their bedroom and nosing round, talking to myself, so that they wouldn't know I was watching them, but they were never up to anything that I could see. In the end it beat me. It seemed to depend on being grown-up and giving people rings, and I realized I'd have to wait.

But at the same time I wanted him to see that I was only waiting, not giving up the fight. One evening when he was being particularly obnoxious, chattering away well above my head, I let him have it.

"Mummy," I said, "do you know what I'm going to do when I grow up?"

"No, dear," she replied. "What?"

"I'm going to marry you," I said quietly.

Father gave a great guffaw out of him, but he didn't take me in.[41] I knew it must only be pretence. And Mother, in spite of everything, was pleased. I felt she was probably relieved to know that one day Father's hold on her would be broken.

"Won't that be nice?" she said with a smile.

"It'll be very nice," I said confidently. "Because we're going to have lots and lots of babies."

"That's right, dear," she said placidly. "I think we'll have one soon, and then you'll have plenty of company."

I was no end pleased[42] about that because it showed that in spite of the way she gave in to Father she still considered my wishes. Besides, it would put the Geneys in their place.

It didn't turn out like that, though. To begin with, she was very preoccupied — I supposed about where she would get the seventeen and six — and though Father took to staying out late in the evenings it did me no particular good. She stopped taking me for walks, became as touchy as blazes,[43] and smacked me for nothing at all. Sometimes I wished I'd never mentioned the confounded baby — I seemed to have a genius for bringing calamity on myself.

And calamity it was! Sonny arrived in the most apalling hullabaloo — even that much he couldn't do without a fuss — and from the first moment I disliked him. He was a difficult child — so far as I was concerned he was always difficult — and demanded far too much attention. Mother was simply silly about him, and couldn't see when he was only showing off.[44] As company he was worse that useless. He slept all day, and I had to go round the house on tiptoe to avoid waking him. It wasn't any longer a question of not waking Father. The slogan now was "Don't-wake-Sonny!" I couldn't understand why the child wouldn't sleep at the proper time, so whenever Mother's back was turned I woke him. Sometimes to keep him awake I pinched him as well. Mother caught me at it one day and gave me a most unmerciful slapping.

One evening, when Father was coming in from work, I was playing trains in the front garden. I let on not to notice him; instead, I pretended to be talking to myself, and said in a loud voice: "If another bloody baby comes into this house, I'm going out!"

Father stopped dead[45] and looked at me over his shoulder.

"What's that you said?" he asked sternly.

"I was only talking to myself," I replied, trying to conceal my panic. "It's private."

He turned and went in without a word. Mind you, I intended it as a solemn warning, but its effect was quite different. Father started being quite nice to me. I could understand that, of course. Mother was quite sickening about Sonny. Even at mealtimes she'd get up and gawk at him in the cradle with an idiotic smile, and tell Father to do the same. He was always polite about it, but he

looked so puzzled you could see he didn't know what she was talking about. He complained of the way Sonny cried at night, but she only got cross and said that Sonny never cried except when there was something up with him — which was a flaming lie,[46] because Sonny never had anything up with him, and only cried for attention. It was really painful to see how simple-minded she was. Father wasn't attractive, but he had a fine intelligence. He saw through Sonny, and now he knew that I saw through him as well.

One night I woke with a start. There was someone beside me in the bed. For one wild moment I felt sure it must be Mother having come to her senses and left Father for good, but then I heard Sonny in convulsions in the next room, and Mother saying: "There! There! There!"[47] and I knew it wasn't she. It was Father. He was lying beside me, wide awake, breathing hard and apparently as mad as hell.

After a while it came to me what he was mad about. It was his turn now. After turning me out of the big bed, he had been turned out himself. Mother had no consideration now for anyone but that poisonous pup, Sonny. I couldn't help feeling sorry for Father. I had been through it all myself, and even at that age I was magnanimous. I began to stroke him down and say: "There! There!" He wasn't exactly responsive.

"Aren't you asleep either?" he snarled.

"Ah, come on and put your arm around us, can't you?" I said, and he did, in a sort of way. Gingerly, I suppose, is how you'd describe it. He was very bony but better than nothing.

At Christmas he went out of his way [48] to buy me a really nice model railway.

(abridged)

Notes

1. **Oedipus complex** — a term used in psychiatry to indicate an exaggerated attachment of a son to his mother with a strong antagonism toward the father. This strong attachment is regarded as a normal stage in the development of children (the female analog of the Oedipus complex is the Electra complex — a strong attachment of the daughter to her father).
2. **Santa Claus** — in nursery folklore, a friend of children who brings presents on Christmas Eve; usually represented as a fat old man who drives over the roofs in a sleigh drawn by reindeer.
3. **Gurkha knife** — a knife or sword with a short blade slightly curved. Gurkha — one of the famous independent fighting people of Hindu religion in Nepal. The hired troops employed by British colonialists in Asia consisted mostly of Gurkhas.
4. **button-stick** — a strip of brass with slots used for polishing buttons without soiling the cloth
5. **There was a bit of the magpie about Father** (metaph. periphrasis) — Father liked to collect and stow away all sorts of things, in this resembling a magpie known for its thiefishness (in a magpie's nest you may find all kind of things, especially bright and glittering ones); the word "magpie" is also used figuratively to indicate a noisy person who talks a lot

6. **demonstrative** — showing clearly her feelings, reactions, etc.
7. **seventeen and six** — seventeen shillings and sixpence
8. **she was too exclusive** — she was inclined to have something of the finest quality (excluding anything that was somewhat inferior); exclusive also means "snobbish", i. e. not mixing with people regarded as inferior in wealth, education, social standing, etc., e. g. The boy was sent to a very exclusive private school. He was a member of the most exclusive clubs. She prided herself on having an exclusive taste.
9. **would have done us fine** — would have suited us perfectly, would have been quite satisfactory; to do — to suit, to be good enough (for), e.g. This coat will do me very well. Will this bicycle do him? These shoes won't do for everyday wear, the heels are too high.
10. **petrified** — stiff with cold (turned into stone); petrified may also mean paralyzed with fear, amazement, etc., e.g. He was petrified with horror.
11. **heard Mass at St. Augustine's** — attended service at a Catholic church
12. **The irony of it!** — Russ. Какая ирония!
13. **with as great a show of indifference as I could muster** — trying to look as indifferent as I possibly could; to muster — to collect, to gather together, e. g. to muster (up) one's strength, courage, etc.
14. **to get into a wax** (slang) — to become furious, to fly into a rage
15. **this was foul play** — this was unfair (foul play usually means some kind of criminal activity, e. g. He sensed there was some foul play going on in the office, but he couldn't put his finger on it. When applied to sports the phrase means breach of rule in a game, match, etc. (Russ. нечестная игра). Ant.: fair play (= acting honestly)
16. **to have some (terrible) hold on** — to have some (terrible) power (influence) over
17. **to crack up** (colloq.) — to praise highly, to extol
18. **feeling like a bottle of champagne** (simile) — ready to burst with excitement, emotion, schemes, etc.
19. **Home** — an institution or place of rest or shelter, an establishment where the needy or afflicted are sheltered and taken care of, such as an orphan's home; (Russ. Дом для престарелых, инвалидов, приют). The boy must have heard some of the neighbours talking about putting one's father "in the Home" and used the phrase without knowing what it meant.
20. **He made room** — he moved away (aside) (Russ. потеснился, подвинулся)
21. **gush** — an extravagant display of sentiment
22. **thornybacks** (= thorn backs) (nursery word) —small fish
23. **Fox and Hounds** — here probably the name of a cafe
24. **like burying a family from the cradle** (simile) — like destroying something cruelly at the very start before it has had a chance to develop
25. **mad** (colloq.) — very angry
26. **pennies from the Post Office** — an allusion to the allowance of a British service man's wife allotted by the Government and collected at the Post Office once a month
27. **caught in the very act** — caught just as one was doing something (Russ. застать на месте преступления); comp. caught red-handed (Russ. поймать с поличным)
28. **you're perished** = perished with cold (Russ. окоченел)
29. **to get one down** — Russ. Сразить
30. **I had convicted her out of her own mouth** — I had used her own words to prove she was guilty
31. **as good as lost** — practically lost; comp. He as good as agreed to help (=actually agreed). The ring was as good as lost (== no hope of finding it).
32. **he got out of it** = got out of this habit. Ant.: to get into the habit of doing something

33. **to cod** (colloq.) — to cheat, to deceive
34. **better fed than taught** — ill-mannered, badly brought-up
35. **let fly at me** — attacked me
36. **as a result of my innocent intercession** (periphrasis) — the words "innocent intercession" imply that the boy had been praying for his father's safe return without really being aware of what it would mean to him
37. **dotty** (colloq.) — crazy
38. **out for murder** — ready to commit murder
39. **he alleged he had left** — he claimed he had left (Russ. Он будто бы оставил); to allege — to assert to be true, but without proving, i. e. An alleged criminal is said to be guilty but his guilt must be proved. The man is alleged to have visited the house at night (== somebody says he has, but there is no proof). An alleged fact is open to doubt.
40. **to see if I had lifted anything** — if I had stolen anything
41. **he didn't take me in** — didn't deceive me
42. **no end pleased** (colloq.) — greatly pleased
43. **touchy as blazes** (colloq.) — terribly irritable; touchy — sensitive (taking offence easily); as blazes (colloq.) — very, awfully, e. g. He grew wild as blazes.
44. **showing off** — trying to impress, to attract attention
45. **to stop dead** — to stop suddenly (also: to stop short)
46. **a flaming lie** — Russ. вопиющая ложь
47. **There! There!** (colloq.) — words said soothingly (Russ. Ну, ну. Успокойся. Не плачь. Тише, тише.)

48 **to go out of one's way** — to try hard, to do one's best

The Love Nest

R. Lardner
(1885-1933)

Ring Lardner was born in Michigan, Ohio. After two years at college he began working in the sports column for various newspapers. His first collection of stories which deal with the life of baseball players was published in 1916 under the title "You Know Me, Al; A Busker's Letters". The following year his collection of satirical stories entitled "Gullible's Travels" appeared in print. However, it was his book "How to Write Short Stories" (1924) that won him recognition as a man of letters. In his collections of stories "What of it?" (1925), "The Love Nest" (1926), "Round Up" (1926) Lardner exposes American reality. His autobiography "The Story of a Wonder Man" (1927) written in satirical tones may be justly considered a masterpiece of American literature.

It must be mentioned that some literary critics called the twenties in American literature the Lardner epoch.

His manner of writing differs greatly from that of other authors of his day. All his works abound in dialogues. By his language characteristics Lardner managed to create such true-to-life, such convincing images that his personages stand out vivid before the readers' eyes leaving an everlasting impression with them.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do with you, Mr. Bartlett," said the great man. "I'm going to take you right out to my home and have you meet the wife and family; stay to dinner and all night. I mean that'll give you a chance to see us just as we are. I mean you can get more that way than if you sat here a whole week, asking me questions."

"But I don't want to put you to a lot of trouble," said Bartlett.

"Trouble!" The great man laughed. "There's no trouble about it. I've got a house that's like a hotel, I mean a big house with lots of servants. But anyway I'm always glad to do anything I can for a writing man. I mean it'll be a pleasure to have you. So if you want to notify your family —"

"I haven't any family," said Bartlett.

"Well, I'm sorry for you! And I bet when you see mine, you'll wish you had one of your own. But I'm glad you can come and we'll start now so as to get there before the kiddies are put away for the night. I mean I want you to be sure and see the kiddies. I've got three."

"I've seen their pictures," said Bartlett. "You must be very proud of them. They're all girls, aren't they?"

"Yes, sir: three girls. But let's go! The Rolls is downstairs and if we start now we'll get there before dark. I mean I want you to see the place while it's still daylight."

The great man — Lou Gregg, president of Modern Pictures, Inc. — escorted his visitor from the magnificent office by a private door and down a private stairway to the avenue, where the glittering car with its glittering chauffeur waited.

"My wife was in town today," said Gregg as they glided northward. "She was through with her shopping and she hates to be away from the house and the kiddies any longer than she can help. Celia's a great home girl. You'd never know she was the same girl now as the girl I married seven years ago. I mean she's different. I mean she's not the same. I mean her marriage and being a mother had developed her. Did you ever see her? I mean in pictures?"

"I think I did once," replied Bartlett. "I remember her as very pretty and vivacious."

"She certainly was! And she is yet! I mean she's even prettier, but of course she ain't a kid, though she looks it. I mean she was only seventeen in that picture and that was ten years ago. I mean she's twenty-seven years old now. It's remarkable how marriage changes them. I mean nobody would ever have thought Celia Sayles would turn out to be a sit-by-the-fire. I mean she still likes a good time, but her home and kiddies come first."

"I see what you mean," said Bartlett.

An hour's drive brought them to Ardsley-on-Hudson and the great man's home.

"A wonderful place!" Bartlett exclaimed as the car approached a white house.

"It ought to be!" said Gregg. "I mean I've spent enough on it. I mean these things cost money."

He indicated with a gesture to the huge house.

"But no amount of money is too much to spend on home. I mean it's a good investment if it tends to make your family proud and satisfied with their home. I mean every nickel I've spent here is like so much insurance; it insures me of a happy wife and family. And what more can a man ask!"

Bartlett didn't know, but the topic was forgotten in the business of leaving the resplendent Rolls and entering the even more resplendent reception hall.

"Forbes will take your things," said Gregg. "And, Forbes, you may tell Dennis that Mr. Bartlett with spend the night." He faced the wide stairway and raised his voice. "Sweetheart!" he called.

From above came the reply in contralto: "Hello, sweetheart!"

"Come down, sweetheart. I've brought you a visitor."

"All right, sweetheart, in just a minute."

Gregg led Bartlett into a living room that was suggestive of an Atlantic City auction sale.

"Sit there," said the host, pointing to a balloon-stuffed easy chair, "and I'll see if we can get a drink. I've got some real old Bourbon that I'd like you to try. Forbes," he addressed the servant, "we want a drink. You'll find a full bottle of that Bourbon in the cupboard."

"It's only half full, sir," said Forbes.

"Half full! That's funny! I mean I opened it last night and just took one drink. I mean it ought to be full."

"It's only half full," repeated Forbes, and went to fetch it.

"I'll have to investigate," Gregg told his guest. "I mean this ain't the first time lately that some of my good stuff has disappeared. When you keep so many servants, it's hard to get all honest ones. But here's Celia!"

Bartlett rose to greet the striking brunette who at this moment made an entrance. With never a glance at him, she minced across the room to her husband and took a half interest in a convincing kiss.

"Well, sweetheart," she said when it was at last over.

"This is Mr. Bartlett, sweetheart," said her husband. "Mr. Bartlett, meet Mrs. Gregg."

Bartlett shook his hostess's proffered two fingers.

"I'm so pleased!" said Celia.

"Mr. Bartlett," Gregg went on, "is with “Mankind”, Ralph Doane's magazine. He is going to write me up; I mean us."

"No, you mean you," said Celia. "I'm sure the public is not interested in great men's wives."

"I am sure you are mistaken, Mrs. Gregg," said Bartlett politely. "In this case at least. You are worth writing up aside from being a great man's wife."

"I'm afraid you're a flatterer, Mr. Bartlett," she returned. "I have been out of the limelight so long that I doubt if anybody remembers me. I'm no longer an artist; merely a happy wife and mother."

While the drinks were being prepared Mr. Bartlett observed his hostess more closely and thought how much more charming she would be if she had used finesse in improving on nature. Her cheeks, her mouth, her eyes, and lashes had been, he guessed, far above the average in beauty before she had begun experimenting with them. And her experiments had been clumsy. She was handsome in spite of her efforts to be handsomer.

"Listen, sweetheart," said her husband. "One of the servants has been helping himself to this Bourbon. I mean it was a full bottle last night and I only had had one little drink out of it. And now it's less than half full. Who do you suppose has been at it?"

"How do I know, sweetheart."

"But you and I and Forbes are the only ones that have a key. I mean it was locked up."

"Maybe you forgot to lock it."

"I never do. Well, anyway, Bartlett, here's a go!"

"Doesn't Mrs. Gregg indulge?" asked Bartlett.

"Only a cocktail before dinner," said Celia. "Lou objects to me drinking whiskey, and I don't like it much anyway."

"I don't object to your drinking whiskey, sweetheart. I just object to your drinking to excess. I mean I think it coarsens a woman to drink I mean it makes them coarse."

"Well, there's no argument, sweetheart. As I say, I don't care whether I have it or not."

"It certainly is great Bourbon!" said Bartlett, smacking his lips and putting his glass back on the tray.

"You bet it is!" Gregg agreed. "I mean you can't buy that kind of stuff any more. I mean it's real stuff. You help yourself when you want another. Mr. Bartlett is going to stay all night, sweetheart. I told him he could get a whole lot more of a line on us that way than just interviewing me in the office. I mean I'm tongue-tied when it comes to talking about my work and my success. I mean it's better to see me out here as I am, in my home, with my family. I mean my home life speaks for itself without my saying a word."

"But, sweetheart," said -his wife, "what about Mr. Latham?"

"Gosh! I forgot all about him! I must phone and see if I can call it off. That's terrible! You see," he explained to Bartlett, "I made a date to K.L.Latham's, the sugar people. We're going to talk over the new club. We're going to have a golf club. I'll phone and see if I can postpone it."

"Oh, don't postpone it on my account!" urged Bartlett. "I can come out again some other time, or I can see you in town."

"I don't see how you can postpone it, sweetheart," said Celia. "Didn't he say old Mr. King was coming? They'll be mad if you don't go."

"I'm afraid they would resent it, sweetheart. Well, I'll tell you. You can entertain Mr. Bartlett and I'll go up there right after dinner and come back as soon as I can. And Bartlett and I can talk when I get back."

"That suits me," said Bartlett.

"I'll be as entertaining as I can," said Celia, "but I'm afraid that isn't very entertaining. However, if I'm too much of a bore, there's plenty to read."

"No danger of my being bored," said Bartlett.

"Well, that's all fixed then," said the relieved host.

"I hope you'll excuse me running away. But listen, sweetheart — where are the kiddies? Mr. Bartlett wants to see them."

"Yes, indeed!" agreed the visitor.

"Of course you'd say so!" Celia said. "But we are proud of them! I suppose all parents are the same. They all think their own children are the only children in the world. Isn't that so, Mr. Bartlett? Or haven't you any children?"

"I'm sorry to say I'm not married."

"Oh, you poor thing! We pity him, don't we, sweetheart? But why aren't you, Mr. Bartlett? Don't tell me you're a woman hater!"

"Not now, anyway," said the gallant Bartlett.

"Do you get that, sweetheart? He's paying you a pretty compliment."

"I heard it, sweetheart. And now I'm sure he's a flatterer. But I must hurry and get the children before Hortense puts them in bed."

"Well," said Gregg when his wife had left the room, "would you say she's changed?"

"A little, and for the better. She's more than fulfilled her early promise."

"I think so," said Gregg. "I mean I think she was a beautiful girl and now she's an even more beautiful woman, I mean wifehood and maternity have given her a kind of a—well, you know—I mean a kind of a pose. I mean a pose. How about another drink?"

They were emptying their glasses when Celia returned with two of her little girls.

"The baby's in bed and I was afraid to ask Hortense to get her up again. But you'll see her in the morning. This is Norma and this is Grace. Girls, this is Mr. Bartlett."

The girls received this news calmly.

"How old are you, Norma?" asked Bartlett.

"Six," said Norma.

"Well," said Bartlett. "And how old is Grace?"

"Four," replied Norma.

"Well," said Bartlett. "And how old is baby sister?"

"One and a half," answered Norma.

"Well," said Bartlett.

As this seemed to be final, "Come, girls," said their mother. "Kiss daddy good night and I'll take you back to Hortense."

"I'll take them," said Gregg. "I'm going upstairs anyway. And you can show Bartlett around. I mean before it gets any darker."

"Good night, girls," said Bartlett, and the children murmured a good night.

"I'll come and see you before you're asleep," Celia told them. And after Gregg had left them out, "Do you really think they're pretty?" he asked Bartlett.

"I certainly do. Especially Norma. She's the image of you," said Bartlett.

"She looks a little like I used to," Celia admitted. "But I hope she doesn't look like me now. I'm too old looking."

"You look remarkably young!" said Bartlett. "No one would believe you're the mother of three children."

"Oh, Mr. Bartlett! But I mustn't forget I'm to show around. Lou is so proud of our home!"

"And with reason," said Bartlett.

"It is wonderful! I call it our love nest. Quite a big nest, don't you think? Mother says it's too big to be cosy: she says she can't think of it as a home. But I always say a place is whatever one makes of it. A woman can be happy in a tent if they love each other. And miserable in a royal palace without love. Don't you think so, Mr. Bartlett?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Is this really such wonderful Bourbon? I think I'll just take a sip of it and see what it's like. It can't hurt me if it's so good. Do you think so, Mr. Bartlett?"

"I don't believe so."

"Well then, I'm going to taste it and if it hurts me it's your fault."

Celia poured a whiskey glass two-thirds full and drained it at a gulp.

"It is good, isn't it?" she said. "Of course I'm not much of a judge I don't care for whiskey and Lou won't let me drink it."

They drank in silence and Celia pressed a button by the door,

"You may take the bottle and try," she told Forbes.

Gregg, having changed his shirt and collar, joined them.

"Well," he said to Bartlett, "have you seen everything?"

"I guess I have, Mr. Gregg," lied the guest readily. "It's a wonderful place!"

"We like it. I mean it suits us. I mean it's my ideal of a real home. And Celia calls it love nest."

"So she told me," said Bartlett.

"She'll always be sentimental," said her husband.

He put his hand on her shoulder, but she drew away.

"I must run up and dress," she said.

Celia, in a black lace dinner gown, was rather quiet during the elaborate meal. Three or four times when Gregg addressed her, she seemed to be thinking of something else and had to ask, "What did you say, sweetheart?" Her face was

red and Bartlett imagined that she had "sneaked" a drink or two besides the two helpings of Bourbon and the cocktail that had preceded the dinner.

"Well, I'll leave you," said Gregg when they were in the living room once more. "I mean the sooner I get started, the sooner I'll be back. Sweetheart, try and keep your guest awake and don't let him die of thirst. Au revoir, Bartlett. I'm sorry, but it can't be helped. There's a fresh bottle of the Bourbon, so go it. I mean help yourself. It's too bad you have to drink alone."

"It is too bad, Mr. Bartlett," said Celia when Gregg had gone.

"What's too bad?" asked Bartlett.

"That you have to drink alone. I feel like I wasn't being a good hostess to let you do it. In fact, I refuse to let you do it. I'll join you in just a little wee sip."

"But it's so soon after dinner!"

"It's never too soon! I'm going to have a drink myself and if you don't join me, you're a quitter."

She mixed two life-sized high-balls and handed one to her guest.

"Now we'll turn on the radio and see if we can't stir things up. There! Now! This is better! Let's dance."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Gregg, but I don't dance."

"Well, you're an old cheese! To make me dance alone! All alone, yes, I'm all alone."

There was no affectation in her voice now and Bartlett was amazed at her unlabored grace as she glided around the big room.

"But it's no fun alone," she complained. "Let's shut the damn thing off and talk."

"I love to watch you dance," said Bartlett.

"Yes, but I'm no Pavlova," said Celia as she silenced the radio. "And besides, it's time for a drink."

"I've still got more than half of mine."

"Well, you had that wine at dinner, so I'll have to catch up with you."

She poured herself another high-ball and began the task of "catching up."

"The trouble with you, Mr.— now isn't that a scream! I can't think of your name."

"Bartlett

"The trouble with you. Barker— do you know what's the trouble with you? You're too sober. See? You're too damn sober! That's the whole trouble, see? If you weren't so sober, we'd be better off. See? What I can't understand is how you can be so sober and me so high."

"You're not used to it."

"Not used to it! That's the cat's pajamas! Say, I'm like this half the time, see? If I wasn't, I'd die!"

"What does your husband say?"

"He don't say because he don't know. See, Barker? There's nights when he's out and there's a few nights when I'm out myself. And there's other nights

when we're both in and I pretend I'm sleepy and I go upstairs. See? But I don't go to bed. See? I have a little party all by myself. See? If I didn't, I'd die!"

"What do you mean, you'd die?"

"You're dumb, Barker. You may be sober, but you're dumb! Did you fall for all that apple sauce about the happy home and the contented wife? Listen, Barker—I'd give anything in the world to be out of this mess. I'd give anything to never see him again."

"Don't you love him any more? Doesn't he love you? Or what?"

"Love! I never did love him! I didn't know what love was! And all his love is for himself!"

"How did you happen to get married?"

"I was a kid; that's the answer. A kid and ambitious. See? He was a director then and he got stuck on me and I thought he'd make me a star. See, Barker? I married him to get myself a chance. And now look at me!"

"I'd say you were fairly well off."

"Well off, am I? I'd change places with the scum of the earth just to be free! See, Barker? And I could have been a star without any help if I'd only realized it. I had the looks and I had the talent. I've got it yet. I could get myself a marquis; maybe a prince! And look what I did get! A self-satisfied, self-centered—! I thought he'd make me! See, Barker? Well, he's made me all right; he's made me a chronic mother and it's a wonder I've got any looks left.

"I fought at first. I told him marriage didn't mean giving up my art, my life work. But it was no use. He wanted a beautiful wife and beautiful children for his beautiful home. Just to show us off. See? I'm part of his chattels. See, Barker? I'm just like his big diamond or his cars or his horses. And he wouldn't stand for his wife 'lowering' herself to act in pictures. Just as if pictures hadn't made him!

"You go back to your magazine tomorrow and write about our love nest. See, Barker? And be sure and don't get mixed and call it a baby ranch. Babies! You thought little. Norma was pretty. Well, she is. And what is it going to get her? A rich—of a husband that treats her like a --! That's what it'll get her if I don't interfere. I hope I don't live long enough to see her grow up, but if I do, I'm going to advise her to run away from home and live her own life. And be somebody! Not a thing like I am! See, Barker?"

"Did you ever think of a divorce?"

”Did I ever think of one! Listen — but there's no chance. I've got nothing on him, and no matter what he had on me, he'd never let the world know it. He'd keep me here and torture me like he does now, only worse. But I haven't done anything wrong, see? The men I might care for, they're all scared of him and his money and power. See, Barker? And the others are just as bad as him. Like fat old Morris, the hotel man, that everybody thinks he's a model husband. The reason he don't step out more is because he's too stingy. But I could have him if I wanted him. Every time he gets near enough to me, he squeezes my hand. I

guess he thinks it's a nickel, the tight old ——! But come on, Barker. Let's have a drink. I'm running down."

"I think it's about time you were running up- upstairs," said Bartlett. "If I were you, I'd try to be in bed and asleep when Gregg gets home."

”You're all right, Barker. And after this drink I'm going to do just as you say. Only I thought of it before you did, see? I think of it lots of nights. And tonight you can help me out by telling him I had a bad headache."

Left alone, Bartlett thought a while, then read, and finally dozed off. He was dozing when Gregg returned.

"Well, well, Bartlett," said the great man, "did Celia desert you?"

"It was perfectly all right, Mr. Gregg. She had a headache and I told her to go to bed."

"She's had a lot of headaches lately: reads too much, I guess. Well, I'm sorry I had this date. It was about a new golf club and I had to be there. I mean I'm going to be president of it. I see you consoled yourself with some of the Bourbon. I mean the bottle doesn't look as full as it did."

"I hope you'll forgive me for helping myself so generously," said Bartlett. "I don't get stuff like that every day"

"Well, what do you say if we turn in? We can talk on the way to town tomorrow. Though I guess you won't have much to ask me. I guess you know all about us now."

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Gregg. I've got plenty of material if I can just handle it."

Celia had not put in an appearance when Gregg and his guest were ready to leave the house next day.

"She always sleeps late," said Gregg. "I mean she never wakes up very early. But she's later than usual this morning. Sweetheart!" he called up the stairs.

"Yes, sweetheart," came the reply.

"Mr. Bartlett's leaving now. I mean he's going."

"Oh, good-by, Mr. Bartlett. Please forgive me for not being down to see you off."

"You're forgiven, Mrs. Gregg. And thanks for your hospitality."

"Good-by, sweetheart!"

"Good-by, sweetheart!"

Thursday Evening

by Christopher Morley

(Abridged)

Morley, Christopher (1890-1957), an American author, received unusual recognition early in his career. Among his widely known novels are "Kitty Foyle" and "The Trojan Horse”. In his popular short play "Thursday Evening",

Christopher Morley opposes the common mother-in-law stereotype with two very likable and charming women.

The scene is a small suburban kitchen in the modest home of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Johns. A meal has recently been cooked, as is shown by a general confusion of pots and pans and dishcloths.

Laura, who is an attractive little person, aged about twenty-three, is in that slightly tense condition of a young hostess who has had a long and trying day with house and baby, and has also cooked and served a dinner for four, both the grandmothers are on a visit.

Both husband and wife are washing up. They are in good humour at first but every time one or the other refers to his or her mother the atmosphere becomes tense. Gordon, more than his wife Laura, takes pains to avoid a quarrel and changes the subject whenever he is aware of danger. When scraping portions of food off the soiled plates Gordon picks out several large pieces of meat, lettuce, butter, etc., which he puts on one plate at one side. Later his wife sees the plate of odds and ends and scrapes its contents into the garbage pail.

Among other things Gordon says that he's a little worried about his mother as she hardly ate any of her salad. This time, it is Laura who tries honourably to avert the gathering storm by mentioning that Junior drank out of a cup the first time. But even here they are on the edge of an abyss as the cup was the one used by Laura's mother when she was a baby. Gordon feels slighted as his own cup was not used.*

Though he's been trying to tide over the mutually realized danger point, by talking desperately, Laura blows up at last, when Gordon begins hunting for the plate with "a lot of perfectly good stuff" he saved.

Laura: Well, if you think I'm going to keep a lot of half-eaten salad your mother picked over —

Gordon (*seizes garbage pail, lifts it up to the sink and begins to explore its contents. His fuse also is rapidly shortening*): My Lord, it's no wonder we never have any money to spend if we chuck half of it away in waste. (*Picking out various selections.*) Waste! Look at that piece of cheese, and those potatoes. You could take those things, and some of this meat, and make a nice economical hash for lunch —

Laura: It's a wonder you wouldn't get a job as a scavenger. I never heard of a husband like you, rummaging through the garbage pail.

Gordon (*blows up*): Do you know what the one unforgivable sin is? It's waste! It makes me wild to think of working and working like a dog, and half of what I earn just thrown away. Look at this, just look at it! (*Displays a grisly object.*) There's enough meat on that bone to make soup. Oh, ye gods, about half a dozen slices of bread. What's the matter with them, I'd like to know.

Laura: I think it's the most disgusting thing I ever heard of. To go picking over the garbage pail like that. You attend to your affairs and I'll attend to mine.

Gordon: I guess throwing away good, hard-earned money is my affair, isn't it?

Laura: You're always quick enough to find fault. You don't seem to know when you're lucky. You come back at night and find your home well cared for and me slaving over a hot dinner, and do you ever say a word of thanks? No, all you can think of is finding fault. I can't imagine how you were brought up. Your mother —

Gordon: Just leave my mother out of it. I guess she didn't spoil me the way yours did you. Of course, I wasn't an only daughter —

Laura: I wish you had been. Then I wouldn't have married you.

Gordon: I suppose you think that if you'd married Jack Davis or some other of those jokers you'd never have had to see the inside of a kitchen —

Laura: If Junior grows up with your disposition, all I can say is I hope he'll never get married.

Gordon: If he gets married, I hope it'll be to some girl who understands something about economy —

Laura: If he gets married, I hope he'll be man enough not to be always finding fault —

Gordon: Well, he won't get married! I'll put him wise to what marriage means, fussing like this all the time —

Laura: Yes, he will get married. He shall get married!

Gordon: Oh, this is too absurd —

Laura: He shall get married, just to be a humiliating example to his father. I'll bring him up the way a husband ought to be.

Gordon: In handcuffs, I suppose —

Laura: And his wife won't have to sit and listen to perpetual criticism from his mother —

Gordon: If you're so down on mothers-in-law, it's queer you're anxious to be one yourself. The expectant mother-in-law!

Laura: All right, be vulgar, I dare say you can't help it.

Gordon: Great Scott, what did you think marriage was like, anyway? Did you expect to go through life having everything done for you, without a little hard work to make it interesting?

Laura: Is it necessary to shout?

Gordon: Now let me tell you something. Let's see if you can ratify it from your extensive observation of life. Is there anything in the world so cruel as bringing up a girl in absolute ignorance of housework? Marriage ought not to be performed before an altar, but before a kitchen sink.

Laura (*furiously*): I ought to have known that oil and water won't mix. I ought to have known that a vulgar, selfish, conceited man couldn't make a girl happy who was brought up in a refined family. You're too common, too ordinary, to know when you're lucky. You get a charming, aristocratic wife and expect her to grub along like a washerwoman. You try to crush all the life and

spirit out of her. You ought to have married an icebox — that's the only thing in this house you're really attentive to.

Gordon: Now listen —

Laura (*will not be checked*): Talk about being spoiled — why, your mother babies you so, you think you're the only man on earth. (*Sarcastically.*) Her poor, overworked boy, who tries so hard and gets all fagged out in the office and struggles so nobly to support his family! I wonder how you would like to run this house and bear a child and take care of it and cook a big dinner and be sneered at and never a word of praise. All you can think of is picking over the garbage pail and finding fault —

Gordon (*like a fool*): I didn't find fault. I found some good food being wasted.

Laura: All right, if you love the garbage pail better than you do your wife, you can live with it. (*Flings her dish towel on the floor and exits into dining room.*)

(*Gordon stands irresolutely at the sink, and makes a few gloomy motions among the unfinished dishes. He glares at the garbage can. Then he carefully gathers those portions of food that he has chosen as being still usable, then puts them on a plate and, after some hesitation, puts the plate in the icebox. He is about to do some other things but then a sudden fit of anger seizes him, he tears off apron, throws it on the floor, and goes out, slamming door.*

After a brief pause, Mrs.Sheffield and later Mrs.Johns enter the kitchen. They begin putting things to rights. They work like automatons. For perhaps two minutes not a word is said, and the two seem, by searching side glances, to be probing each other's mood.)

Mrs Johns: If it wasn't so tragic I'd laugh. (*A pause, during which they work busily.*)

Mrs Sheffield: If it wasn't so comic I'd cry. (*Another pause*).I guess it's my fault. Poor Laura, I'm afraid I have spoiled her.

Mrs Johns: My fault, I think. Two mothers-in-law at once is too much for any young couple. I didn't know you were here, or I wouldn't have come.

Mrs Sheffield: Laura is so dreadfully sensitive, poor child —

Mrs Johns: Gordon works so hard at the office. You know he's trying get promoted to the sales department, and I suppose it tells on his nerves —

Mrs Sheffield: If Laura could afford to have a nurse to help with the baby, she wouldn't get so exhausted —

Mrs Johns: Gordon says he wants to take out some more insurance, that's why he worries so about economy. It isn't for himself; he's very unselfish —

Mrs Sheffield (*a little tartly*): Still, I do think that sometimes — (*They pause and look at each other quickly*). My gracious, we'll be at it ourselves if we don't look out! (*She goes to the clothes-horse and rearranges the garments, on it. She holds up a Lilliputian shirt, and they both smile.*)

Mrs Johns: That darling baby! I hope he won't have poor Gordon's quick temper. It runs in the Johns family, I'm afraid. You know Gordon's father used to say that Adam and Eve didn't know when they were well off. He said that was why they called it the Garden of Eden.

Mrs Sheffield: Why?

Mrs Johns: Because there was no mother-in-law there.

Mrs Sheffield: Poor children, they have such a lot to learn! I really feel ashamed, Mrs Johns, because Laura is an undisciplined little thing, and I'm afraid I've always petted her too much. She had such a lot of attention before she met Gordon, and was made so much of, it gave her wrong ideas.

Mrs Johns: I wish Gordon was a little younger; I'd like to turn him up and spank him. He's dreadfully stubborn and tactless -

Mrs Sheffield: But I'm afraid I did make a mistake. Laura was having such a good time as a girl, I was always afraid she'd have a hard awakening when she married. But Mr. Sheffield had a good deal of money at that time, and he used to say, "She's only young once. Let her enjoy herself."

Mrs Johns: My husband was shortsighted, too. He had had to skimp so that he brought up Gordon to have a terror of wasting a nickel.

Mrs Sheffield: Very sensible. I wish Mr Sheffield had had a little more of that terror. I shall have to tell him what his policy has resulted in. But really, you know, when I heard them at it, I could hardly help admiring them. It brings back old times!

Mrs Johns: So it does! (*A pause*). But we can't let them go on like this. A little vigorous quarrelling is good for everybody. It's a kind of spiritual laxative. But they carry it too far.

Mrs Sheffield: They're awfully ingenious. They were even bickering about Junior's future mother-in-law. I suppose she's still in school, whoever she may be!

Mrs Johns: Being a mother-in-law is almost as painful as being a mother.

Mrs Sheffield: I think every marriage ought to be preceded by a treaty of peace between the two mothers. If they understand each other, everything will work out all right.

Mrs Johns: You're right. When each one takes sides with her own child, it's fatal.

Mrs Sheffield (*lowering her voice*): Look here, I think I know how we can make them ashamed of themselves. Where are they now?

Mrs Johns (*goes cautiously to dining-room door, and peeps through*): Laura is lying on the couch in the living room. I think she's crying — her face is buried in the cushions.

Mrs Sheffield: Splendid. That means she's listening with all her ears. (*Tiptoes to the window.*) I can't see Gordon, but I think he's walking around the garden —

Mrs Johns (*quietly*): If we were to talk a little louder he'd sit on the back steps to hear it —

Mrs Sheffield: Exactly. Now listen! (*They put their heads together and whisper; the audience does not hear what is said.*)

Mrs Johns: Fine! Oh, that's fine! *(Mrs Sheffield whispers again, inaudibly.*) But wait a moment. Don't you think it would be better if I praise Laura and you praise Gordon? They won't expect that, and it might shame them —

Mrs Sheffield: No, no! Don't you see— (*Whispers again, inaudibly.*)

Mrs Johns: You're right. Cunning as serpents and harmless as doves — (*They carefully set both doors ajar.*)

Mrs Sheffield: I only hope we won't wake the baby —

(*They return to the task of cleaning up, and talk very loudly, in pretended quarrel. Then each one begins praising her own child and criticizing the other. Their last words are*):

Mrs Sheffield: Yes, as Laura's mother I can't let her go on like this. A husband, a home, and a baby — it's enough to ruin any woman.

Mrs Johns: It's only fair to both sides to end it all. I never heard of such brutal hardships. Gordon can't fight against these things any longer. Throwing away a soupbone and three slices of bread! I wonder he doesn't go mad.

Mrs Sheffield: We've saved them just in time.

(*They look at each other knowingly, with the air of those who have done a sound bit of work. Then they stealthily open the door at the rear. and exeunt up the back stairs.*

There is a brief pause; then the dining room door opens like an explosion, and Laura bursts in. She stands for a moment, wild-eyed, stamps her foot in a passion. Then she seizes one of the baby shirts from the rack, and drops into the chair by the table, crying. She buries her head in her arms, concealing the shirt. Enter Gordon, from porch. He stands uncertainly, evidently feeling like a fool.)

Gordon: I'm sorry, I — I left my pipe in here. (*Finds it by the sink.*)

Laura (*her face still hidden*): Oh, Gordie, was it all a mistake?

Gordon (*troubled, pats her shoulder tentatively*): Now listen, Creature, don't. You'll make yourself sick.

Laura: I never thought I'd hear such things — from my own mother.

Gordon: I never heard such rot. They must be mad, both of them.

Laura: Then you were listening, too —

Gordon: Yes. Why, they're deliberately trying to set us against each other.

Laura: They wouldn't have dared speak like that if they had known we could hear. Gordon, I don't think it's legal —

Gordon: I'm afraid the law doesn't give one much protection against one's mothers.

Laura: (*miserably*): I guess she's right. I am spoiled, and I am silly and I am extravagant —

Gordon: Don't be silly, darling. That's crazy stuff. I'm not overworked, and even if I were I'd love it, for you —

Laura: I don't want a nurse for Junior. I wouldn't have one in the house. (*Sits up, disheveled, and displays the small shirt she has been clutching.*) Gordon, I'm not an amateur! I love that baby and I am scientific. I keep a chart of his weight every week.

Gordon: Yes, I know, ducky, Gordon understands.

Laura: Nobody can take away my darling baby —

Gordon: It was my fault, dear, I am obstinate and disagreeable —

Laura: Gordon, you mustn't work too hard. You know you're all I have (*a sob*) since Mother's gone back on me.

Gordon (*patting her*): I think it's frightful, the things they said. What are they trying to do, break up a happy home?

Laura: We are happy, aren't we?

Gordon: Well, I should say so. Did you ever hear me complain? (*Takes her in his arms.*)

Laura: No, Gordie. It was cruel of them to try to make trouble between us; but, perhaps, some of the things they said —

Gordon: Were true?

Laura: Well, not exactly true, dear, but—interesting! Your mother is right, you do have a hard time, and I'll try —

Gordon (*stops her*): No, your mother is right. I've been a brute —

Laura: I'm lucky to have such a husband — (*They are silent a moment.*) You know, Gordie, we mustn't let them know we heard them.

Gordon: No, I suppose not. But it's hard to forgive that sort of talk.

Laura: Even if they did say atrocious things, I think they really love us —

Gordon: We'll be a bit cold and standoffish until things blow over.

Laura (*complacently*): If I'm ever a mother-in-law, I shall try to be very understanding—

Gordon: Yes, Creature. Do you remember why I call you Creature?

Laura: Do I not?

Gordon: There was an adjective omitted, you remember.

Laura: Oh, Gordie, that's one of the troubles of married life. So many of the nice adjectives seem to get omitted.

Gordon: Motto for married men: Don't run short'or adjectives! You remember what the adjective was?

Laura: Tell me.

Gordon: Adorable. It was an abbreviation for Adorable Creature. (*Holds her. They are both perfectly happy.*) I love our little Thursday evenings.

Laura (*partly breaks from his embrace*): Sssh! (*Listens.*) Was that the baby?

***Junior:** *the younger, especially of two brothers or a father and son with the same first name. Gordon John's son is also named Gordon, he will be called Gordon Johns. The parents simply call him Junior.*

The Escape

Somerset Maugham

I have always been convinced that if a woman once made up her mind to marry a man nothing but instant flight could save him. Not always that; for once a friend of mine, seeing the inevitable loom menacingly before him, took ship from a certain port (with a tooth-brush for all his luggage, so conscious was he of his danger and the necessity for immediate action) and spent a year travelling round the world; but when, thinking himself safe (women are fickle, he said, and in twelve months she will have forgotten all about me), he landed at the selfsame port the first person he saw gaily waving to him from the quay was the little lady from whom he had fled. I have only once known a man who in such circumstances managed to extricate himself. His name was Roger Charing. He was no longer young when he fell in love with Ruth Barlow and he had sufficient experience to make him careful; but Ruth Barlow had a gift (or should I call it a quality?) that renders most men defenceless, and it was this that dispossessed Roger of his common sense, his prudence and his worldly wisdom. He went down like a row of ninepins.[1] This was the gift of pathos. Mrs. Barlow, for she was twice a widow had splendid dark eyes and they were the most moving I ever saw; they seemed to be ever on the point of filling with tears; they suggested that the world was too much for her, and you felt that, poor dear, her sufferings had been more than anyone should be asked to bear. If, like Roger Charing, you were a strong, hefty fellow with plenty of money, it was almost inevitable that you should say to yourself: I must stand between the hazards of life and this helpless little thing, oh, how wonderful it would be to take the sadness out of those big and lovely eyes! I gathered from Roger that everyone had treated Mrs. Barlow very badly. She was apparently one of those unfortunate persons with whom nothing by any chance goes right. If she married a husband he beat her; if she employed a broker he cheated her; if she engaged a cook she drank. She never had a little lamb but it was sure to die.[2]

When Roger told me that he had at last persuaded her to marry him, I wished him joy.

"I hope you'll be good friends," he said. "She's a little afraid of you know; she thinks you're callous."

"Upon my word I don't know why she should think that."

"You do like her, don't you?"

"Very much."

“She's had a rotten time, poor dear. I feel so dreadfully sorry for her."

"Yes," I said.

I couldn't say less. I knew she was stupid and I thought she was scheming. My own belief was that she was as hard as nails.

The first time I met her we had played bridge together and when she was my partner she twice trumped my best card. I behaved like an angel, but I confess that I thought if the tears were going to well up into anybody's eyes they should have been mine rather than hers. And when, having by the end of the evening lost a good deal of money to me, she said she would send me a cheque and never did, I could not but think that I and not she should have worn a pathetic expression when next we met.

Roger introduced her to his friends. He gave her lovely jewels He took her here, there, and everywhere. Their marriage was announced for the immediate future. Roger was very happy. He was committing a good action and at the same time doing something he had very much a mind to. It is an uncommon situation and it is not surprising if he was a trifle more pleased with himself than was altogether becoming.

Then, on a sudden, he fell out of love. I do not know why. It could hardly have been that he grew tired of her conversation, for she had never had any conversation. Perhaps it was merely that this pathetic look of hers ceased to wring his heart-strings. His eyes were opened and he was once more the shrewd man of the world he had been. He became acutely conscious that Ruth Barlow had made up her mind to marry him and he swore a solemn oath that nothing would induce him to marry Ruth Barlow. But he was in a quandary. Now that he was in possession of his senses he saw with clearness the sort of woman he had to deal with and was aware that, if he asked her to release him, she would (in her appealing way) assess her wounded feelings at an immoderately high figure.[3] Besides, it is always awkward for a man to jilt a woman. People are apt to think he has behaved badly.

Roger kept his own counsel. He gave neither by word nor by gesture an indication that his feelings towards Ruth Barlow had changed. He remained attentive to all her wishes; he took her to dine at restaurants, they went to the play together, he sent her flowers; he was sympathetic and charming. They had made up their minds that they would be married as soon as they found a house that suited them, for he lived in chambers and she in furnished rooms; and they set about looking at desirable residences. The agents sent Roger orders to view and he took Ruth to see a number of houses. It was very hard to find anything that was quite satisfactory. Roger applied to more agents. They visited house after house. They went over them thoroughly, examining them from the cellars in the basement to the attics under the roof. Sometimes they were too large and sometimes they were too small; sometimes they were too far from the centre of things and sometimes they were too close; sometimes they were too expensive and sometimes they wanted too many repairs; sometimes they were too stuffy and sometimes they were too airy; sometimes they were too dark and sometimes they were too bleak. Roger always found a fault that made the house unsuitable.

Of course he was hard to please; he could not bear to ask his dear Ruth to live in any but the perfect house, and the perfect house wanted finding. Househunting is a tiring and a tiresome business and presently Ruth began to grow peevish. Roger begged her to have patience; somewhere, surely, existed the very house they were looking for, and it only needed a little perseverance and they would find it. They looked at hundreds of houses; they climbed thousands of stairs; they inspected innumerable kitchens. Ruth was exhausted and more than once lost her temper.

"If you don't find a house soon," she said, "I shall have to reconsider my position. Why, if you go on like this we shan't be married for years."

"Don't say that," he answered, “I beseech you to have patience. I've just received some entirely new lists from agents I've only just heard of. There must be at least sixty houses on them."

They set out on the chase again. They looked at more houses and more houses. For two years they looked at houses. Ruth grew silent and scornful: her pathetic, beautiful eyes acquired an expression that was almost sullen. There are limits to human endurance. Mrs. Barlow had the patience of an angel, but at last she revolted.

"Do you want to marry me or do you not?" she asked him.

There was an unaccustomed hardness in her voice, but it did not affect the gentleness of his reply.

"Of course I do. We'll be married the very moment we find a house. By the way I've just heard of something that might suit us."

"I don't feel well enough to look at any more houses just yet."

“Poor dear, I was afraid you were looking rather tired."

Ruth Barlow took to her bed. She would not see Roger and he had to content himself with calling at her lodgings to enquire and sending her flowers. He was as ever assiduous and gallant. Every day he wrote and told her that he had heard of another house for them to look at. A week passed and then he received the following letter:

Roger,

I do not think you really love me. I have found someone who is anxious to take care of me and I am going to be married to him to-day.

Ruth.

He sent back his reply by special messenger:

Ruth,

Your news shatters me. I shall never get over the blow, but of course happiness must be my first consideration. I send you herewith seven orders to view; they arrived by this morning's post and I am quite sure you will find, among them a house that will exactly suit you.

Roger.

Notes

1. **He went down like a row of ninepins**. (fig.) here: He was defeated and at once and surrendered without resisting.
2. **She never had a little lamb but it was sure to die**: There was never anything clear to her that she wouldn't lose. "A little lamb" is somebody that one loves dearly; an allusion to the well-known nursery rhyme:

   Mary had a little lamb.
   Its fleece was white as snow,
   And everywhere that Mary went,
   The lamb was sure to go.
3. **She would assess her wounded feelings, at an immoderately high figure**: She would make him pay much for jilting her.

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