

SESSION 2

Readings: Harriet Beecher Stowe, "A Scholar's Adventures in the Country"
Herman Melville, "The Fiddler"
Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Story of B24"
Katherine Mansfield, "Miss Brill"



Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) was an American author and abolitionist. She is best known for her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852),

Harriet Beecher Stowe, "A Scholar's Adventures in the Country"

"If we could only live in the country," said my wife, "how much easier it would be to live!"

"And how much cheaper!" said I.

"To have a little place of our own, and raise our own things!" said my wife. "Dear me! I am heartsick when I think of the old place at home, and father's great garden. What peaches and melons we used to have! what green peas and corn! Now one has to buy every cent's worth of these things--and how they taste! Such wilted, miserable corn! Such peas! Then, if we lived in the country, we should have our own cow, and milk and cream in abundance; our own hens and chickens. We could have custard and ice-cream every day."

"To say nothing of the trees and flowers, and all that," said I.

The result of this little domestic duet was that my wife and I began to ride about the city of ---- to look up some pretty, interesting cottage, where our visions of rural bliss might be realized. Country residences, near the city, we found to bear rather a high price; so that it was no easy matter to find a situation suitable to the length of our purse; till, at last, a judicious friend suggested a happy expedient.

"Borrow a few hundred," he said, "and give your note; you can save enough, very soon, to make the difference. When you raise everything you eat, you know it will make your salary go a wonderful deal further."

"Certainly it will," said I. "And what can be more beautiful than to buy places by the simple process of giving one's note?--'tis so neat, and handy, and convenient!"

"Why," pursued my friend, "there is Mr. B., my next-door neighbor--'tis enough to make one sick of life in the city to spend a week out on his farm. Such princely living as one gets! And he assures me that it costs him very little--scarce anything perceptible, in fact."

"Indeed!" said I; "few people can say that."

"Why," said my friend, "he has a couple of peach-trees for every month, from June till frost, that furnish as many peaches as he, and his wife, and ten children can dispose of. And then he has grapes, apricots, etc.; and last year his wife sold fifty dollars' worth from her strawberry patch, and had an abundance for the table besides. Out of the milk of only one cow they had butter enough to sell three or four pounds a week, besides abundance of milk and cream; and madam has the butter for her pocket money. This is the way country people manage."

"Glorious!" thought I. And my wife and I could scarcely sleep, all night, for the brilliancy of our anticipations!

To be sure our delight was somewhat damped the next day by the coldness with which my good old uncle, Jeremiah Standfast, who happened along at precisely this crisis, listened to our visions.

"You'll find it pleasant, children, in the summertime," said the hard-fisted old man, twirling his blue-checked pocket-handkerchief; "but I'm sorry you've gone in debt for the land."

"Oh, but we shall soon save that--it's so much cheaper living in the country!" said both of us together.

"Well, as to that, I don't think it is, to city-bred folks."

Here I broke in with a flood of accounts of Mr. B.'s peach-trees, and Mrs. B.'s strawberries, butter, apricots, etc., etc.; to which the old gentleman listened with such a long, leathery, unmoved quietude of visage as quite provoked me, and gave me the worst possible opinion of his judgment. I was disappointed, too; for as he was reckoned one of the best practical farmers in the county, I had counted on an enthusiastic sympathy with all my agricultural designs.

"I tell you what, children," he said, "a body can live in the country, as you say, amazin' cheap; but then a body must _know how"--and my uncle spread his pocket-handkerchief thoughtfully out upon his knees, and shook his head gravely.

I thought him a terribly slow, stupid old body, and wondered how I had always entertained so high an opinion of his sense.

"He is evidently getting old," said I to my wife; "his judgment is not what it used to be."

At all events, our place was bought, and we moved out, well pleased, the first morning in April, not at all remembering the ill savor of that day for matters of wisdom. Our place was a pretty cottage, about two miles from the city, with grounds that had been tastefully laid out. There was no lack of winding paths, arbors, flower borders, and rosebushes, with which my wife was especially pleased. There was a little green lot, strolling off down to a brook, with a thick grove of trees at the end, where our cow was to be pastured.

The first week or two went on happily enough in getting our little new pet of a house into trimness and good order; for as it had been long for sale, of course there was any amount of little repairs that had been left to amuse the leisure hours of the purchaser. Here a doorstep had given way, and needed replacing; there a shutter hung loose, and wanted a hinge; abundance of glass needed setting; and as to painting and papering, there was no end to that. Then my wife wanted a door cut here, to make our bedroom more convenient, and a china closet knocked up there, where no china closet before had been. We even ventured on throwing out a bay-window from our sitting-room, because we had luckily lighted on a workman who was so cheap that it was an actual saving of money to employ him. And to be sure our darling little cottage did lift up its head wonderfully for all this garnishing and

furbishing. I got up early every morning, and nailed up the rosebushes, and my wife got up and watered geraniums, and both flattered ourselves and each other on our early hours and thrifty habits. But soon, like Adam and Eve in Paradise, we found our little domain to ask more hands than ours to get it into shape. So says I to my wife, "I will bring out a gardener when I come next time, and he shall lay the garden out, and get it into order; and after that I can easily keep it by the work of my leisure hours."

Our gardener was a very sublime sort of man,--an Englishman, and of course used to laying out noblemen's places,--and we became as grasshoppers in our own eyes when he talked of Lord This and That's estate, and began to question us about our carriage drive and conservatory; and we could with difficulty bring the gentleman down to any understanding of the humble limits of our expectations; merely to dress out the walks, and lay out a kitchen garden, and plant potatoes, turnips, beets and carrots, was quite a descent for him. In fact, so strong were his aesthetic preferences, that he persuaded my wife to let him dig all the turf off from a green square opposite the bay window, and to lay it out into divers little triangles, resembling small pieces of pie, together with circles, mounds, and various other geometrical ornaments, the planning and planting of which soon engrossed my wife's whole soul. The planting of the potatoes, beets, carrots, etc., was entrusted to a raw Irishman; for as to me, to confess the truth, I began to fear that digging did not agree with me. It is true that I was exceedingly vigorous at first, and actually planted with my own hands two or three long rows of potatoes; after which I got a turn of rheumatism in my shoulder, which lasted me a week. Stooping down to plant beets and radishes gave me a vertigo, so that I was obliged to content myself with a general superintendence of the garden; that is to say, I charged my Englishman to see that my Irishman did his duty properly, and then got on to my horse and rode to the city. But about one part of the matter, I must say, I was not remiss; and that is, in the purchase of seed and garden utensils. Not a day passed that I did not come home with my pockets stuffed with choice seeds, roots, etc.; and the variety of my garden utensils was unequalled. There was not a priming hook of any pattern, not a hoe, rake, or spade great or small, that I did not have specimens of; and flower seeds and bulbs were also forthcoming in liberal proportions. In fact, I had opened an account at a thriving seed store; for when a man is driving business on a large scale, it is not always convenient to hand out the change for every little matter, and buying things on account is as neat and agreeable a mode of acquisition as paying bills with one's notes.

"You know we must have a cow," said my wife, the morning of our second week. Our friend the gardener, who had now worked with us at the rate of two dollars a

day for two weeks, was at hand in a moment in our emergency. We wanted to buy a cow, and he had one to sell--a wonderful cow, of a real English breed. He would not sell her for any money, except to oblige particular friends; but as we had patronized him, we should have her for forty dollars. How much we were obliged to him! The forty dollars were speedily forthcoming, and so also was the cow.

"What makes her shake her head in that way?" said my wife, apprehensively, as she observed the interesting beast making sundry demonstrations with her horns. "I hope she's gentle."

The gardener fluently demonstrated that the animal was a pattern of all the softer graces, and that this head-shaking was merely a little nervous affection consequent on the embarrassment of a new position. We had faith to believe almost anything at this time, and therefore came from the barn yard to the house as much satisfied with our purchase as Job with his three thousand camels and five hundred yoke of oxen. Her quondam master milked her for us the first evening, out of a delicate regard to her feelings as a stranger, and we fancied that we discerned forty dollars' worth of excellence in the very quality of the milk.

But alas! the next morning our Irish girl came in with a most rueful face. "And is it milking that baste you'd have me be after?" she said; "sure, and she won't let me come near her."

"Nonsense, Biddy!" said I; "you frightened her, perhaps; the cow is perfectly gentle;" and with the pail on my arm I sallied forth. The moment madam saw me entering the cow yard, she greeted me with a very expressive flourish of her horns.

"This won't do," said I, and I stopped. The lady evidently was serious in her intentions of resisting any personal approaches. I cut a cudgel, and, putting on a bold face, marched towards her, while Biddy followed with her milking stool. Apparently the beast saw the necessity of temporizing, for she assumed a demure expression, and Biddy sat down to milk. I stood sentry, and if the lady shook her head I shook my stick; and thus the milking operation proceeded with tolerable serenity and success.

"There!" said I, with dignity, when the frothing pail was full to the brim. "That will do, Biddy," and I dropped my stick. Dump! came madam's heel on the side of the pail, and it flew like a rocket into the air, while the milky flood showered plentifully over me, and a new broadcloth riding-coat that I had assumed for the first time that morning. "Whew!" said I, as soon as I could get my breath from this extraordinary shower bath; "what's all this?" My wife came running towards the

cow yard, as I stood with the milk streaming from my hair, filling my eyes, and dropping from the tip of my nose; and she and Biddy performed a recitative lamentation over me in alternate strophes, like the chorus in a Greek tragedy. Such was our first morning's experience; but as we had announced our bargain with some considerable flourish of trumpets among our neighbors and friends, we concluded to hush the matter up as much as possible.

"These very superior cows are apt to be cross," said I; "we must bear with it as we do with the eccentricities of genius; besides, when she gets accustomed to us, it will be better."

Madam was therefore installed into her pretty pasture lot, and my wife contemplated with pleasure the picturesque effect of her appearance, reclining on the green slope of the pasture lot, or standing ankle deep in the gurgling brook, or reclining under the deep shadows of the trees. She was, in fact, a handsome cow, which may account, in part, for some of her sins; and this consideration inspired me with some degree of indulgence towards her foibles.

But when I found that Biddy could never succeed in getting near her in the pasture, and that any kind of success in the milking operations required my vigorous personal exertions morning and evening, the matter wore a more serious aspect, and I began to feel quite pensive and apprehensive. It is very well to talk of the pleasures of the milkmaid going out in the balmy freshness of the purple dawn; but imagine a poor fellow pulled out of bed on a drizzly, rainy morning, and equipping himself for a scamper through a wet pasture lot, rope in hand, at the heels of such a termagant [overbearing woman] as mine! In fact, madam established a regular series of exercises, which had all to be gone through before she would suffer herself to be captured; as, first, she would station herself plumb in the middle of a marsh, which lay at the lower part of the lot, and look very innocent and absent-minded, as if reflecting on some sentimental subject. "Suke! Suke! Suke!" I ejaculate, cautiously tottering along the edge of the marsh, and holding out an ear of corn. The lady looks gracious, and comes forward, almost within reach of my hand. I make a plunge to throw the rope over her horns, and away she goes, kicking up mud and water into my face in her flight, while I, losing my balance, tumble forward into the marsh. I pick myself up, and, full of wrath, behold her placidly chewing her cud on the other side, with the meekest air imaginable, as who should say, "I hope you are not hurt, sir." I dash through swamp and bog furiously, resolving to carry all by a coup de main. Then follows a miscellaneous season of dodging, scampering, and bopeeping, among the trees of the grove, interspersed with sundry occasional races across the bog aforesaid. I always

wondered how I caught her every day; and when I had tied her head to one post and her heels to another, I wiped the sweat from my brow, and thought I was paying dear for the eccentricities of genius. A genius she certainly was, for besides her surprising agility, she had other talents equally extraordinary. There was no fence that she could not take down; nowhere that she could not go. She took the pickets off the garden fence at her pleasure, using her horns as handily as I could use a claw hammer. Whatever she had a mind to, whether it were a bite in the cabbage garden, or a run in the corn patch, or a foraging expedition into the flower borders, she made herself equally welcome and at home. Such a scampering and driving, such cries of "Suke here" and "Suke there," as constantly greeted our ears, kept our little establishment in a constant commotion. At last, when she one morning made a plunge at the skirts of my new broadcloth frock coat, and carried off one flap on her horns, my patience gave out, and I determined to sell her.

As, however, I had made a good story of my misfortunes among my friends and neighbors, and amused them with sundry whimsical accounts of my various adventures in the cow-catching line, I found, when I came to speak of selling, that there was a general coolness on the subject, and nobody seemed disposed to be the recipient of my responsibilities. In short, I was glad, at last, to get fifteen dollars for her, and comforted myself with thinking that I had at least gained twenty-five dollars worth of experience in the transaction, to say nothing of the fine exercise.

I comforted my soul, however, the day after, by purchasing and bringing home to my wife a fine swarm of bees.

"Your bee, now," says I, "is a really classical insect, and breathes of Virgil and the Augustan age,--and then she is a domestic, tranquil, placid creature. How beautiful the murmuring of a hive near our honeysuckle of a calm, summer evening! Then they are tranquilly and peacefully amassing for us their stores of sweetness, while they lull us with their murmurs. What a beautiful image of disinterested benevolence!"

My wife declared that I was quite a poet, and the beehive was duly installed near the flower plots, that the delicate creatures might have the full benefit of the honeysuckle and mignonette. My spirits began to rise. I bought three different treatises on the rearing of bees, and also one or two new patterns of hives, and proposed to rear my bees on the most approved model. I charged all the establishment to let me know when there was any indication of an emigrating spirit, that I might be ready to receive the new swarm into my patent mansion.

Accordingly, one afternoon, when I was deep in an article that I was preparing for the "North American Review," intelligence was brought me that a swarm had risen. I was on the alert at once, and discovered, on going out, that the provoking creatures had chosen the top of a tree about thirty feet high to settle on. Now my books had carefully instructed me just how to approach the swarm and cover them with a new hive; but I had never contemplated the possibility of the swarm being, like Haman's gallows, forty cubits high. I looked despairingly upon the smooth-bark tree, which rose, like a column, full twenty feet, without branch or twig. "What is to be done?" said I, appealing to two or three neighbors. At last, at the recommendation of one of them, a ladder was raised against the tree, and, equipped with a shirt outside of my clothes, a green veil over my head, and a pair of leather gloves on my hands, I went up with a saw at my girdle to saw off the branch on which they had settled, and lower it by a rope to a neighbor, similarly equipped, who stood below with the hive.

As a result of this manoeuvre the fastidious little insects were at length fairly installed at housekeeping in my new patent hive, and, rejoicing in my success, I again sat down to my article.

That evening my wife and I took tea in our honeysuckle arbor, with our little ones and a friend or two, to whom I showed my treasures, and expatiated at large on the comforts and conveniences of the new patent hive.

But alas for the hopes of man! The little ungrateful wretches--what must they do but take advantage of my oversleeping myself, the next morning, to clear out for new quarters without so much as leaving me a P. P. C.! Such was the fact; at eight o'clock I found the new patent hive as good as ever; but the bees I have never seen from that day to this!

"The rascally little conservatives!" said I; "I believe they have never had a new idea from the days of Virgil down, and are entirely unprepared to appreciate improvements."

Meanwhile the seeds began to germinate in our garden, when we found, to our chagrin, that, between John Bull and Paddy, there had occurred sundry confusions in the several departments. Radishes had been planted broadcast, carrots and beets arranged in hills, and here and there a whole paper of seed appeared to have been planted bodily. My good old uncle, who, somewhat to my confusion, made me a call at this time, was greatly distressed and scandalized by the appearance of our garden. But by a deal of fussing, transplanting, and replanting, it was got into some

shape and order. My uncle was rather troublesome, as careful old people are apt to be--annoying us by perpetual inquiries of what we gave for this and that, and running up provoking calculations on the final cost of matters; and we began to wish that his visits might be as short as would be convenient.

But when, on taking leave, he promised to send us a fine young cow of his own raising, our hearts rather smote us for our impatience.

"'Tain't any of your new breeds, nephew," said the old man, "yet I can say that she's a gentle, likely young crittur, and better worth forty dollars than many a one that's cried up for Ayrshire or Durham; and you shall be quite welcome to her."

We thanked him, as in duty bound, and thought that if he was full of old-fashioned notions, he was no less full of kindness and good will.

And now, with a new cow, with our garden beginning to thrive under the gentle showers of May, with our flower borders blooming, my wife and I began to think ourselves in Paradise. But alas! the same sun and rain that warmed our fruit and flowers brought up from the earth, like sulky gnomes, a vast array of purple-leaved weeds, that almost in a night seemed to cover the whole surface of the garden beds. Our gardeners both being gone, the weeding was expected to be done by me--one of the anticipated relaxations of my leisure hours.

"Well," said I, in reply to a gentle intimation from my wife, "when my article is finished, I'll take a day and weed all up clean."

Thus days slipped by, till at length the article was dispatched, and I proceeded to my garden. Amazement! Who could have possibly foreseen that anything earthly could grow so fast in a few days! There were no bounds, no alleys, no beds, no distinction of beet and carrot, nothing but a flourishing congregation of weeds nodding and bobbing in the morning breeze, as if to say, "We hope you are well, sir--we've got the ground, you see!" I began to explore, and to hoe, and to weed. Ah! did anybody ever try to clean a neglected carrot or beet bed, or bend his back in a hot sun over rows of weedy onions! He is the man to feel for my despair! How I weeded, and sweat, and sighed! till, when high noon came on, as the result of all my toils, only three beds were cleaned! And how disconsolate looked the good seed, thus unexpectedly delivered from its sheltering tares, and laid open to a broiling July sun! Every juvenile beet and carrot lay flat down wilted, and drooping, as if, like me, they had been weeding, instead of being weeded.

"This weeding is quite a serious matter," said I to my wife; "the fact is, I must have help about it!"

"Just what I was myself thinking," said my wife. "My flower borders are all in confusion, and my petunia mounds so completely overgrown, that nobody would dream what they were meant for!"

In short, it was agreed between us that we could not afford the expense of a full-grown man to keep our place; yet we must reinforce ourselves by the addition of a boy, and a brisk youngster from the vicinity was pitched upon as the happy addition. This youth was a fellow of decidedly quick parts, and in one forenoon made such a clearing in our garden that I was delighted. Bed after bed appeared to view, all cleared and dressed out with such celerity that I was quite ashamed of my own slowness, until, on examination, I discovered that he had, with great impartiality, pulled up both weeds and vegetables.

This hopeful beginning was followed up by a succession of proceedings which should be recorded for the instruction of all who seek for help from the race of boys. Such a loser of all tools, great and small; such an invariable leaver-open of all gates, and letter-down of bars; such a personification of all manner of anarchy and ill luck, had never before been seen on the estate. His time, while I was gone to the city, was agreeably diversified with roosting on the fence, swinging on the gates, making poplar whistles for the children, hunting eggs, and eating whatever fruit happened to be in season, in which latter accomplishment he was certainly quite distinguished. After about three weeks of this kind of joint gardening, we concluded to dismiss Master Tom from the firm, and employ a man.

"Things must be taken care of," said I, "and I cannot do it. 'Tis out of the question." And so the man was secured.

But I am making a long story, and may chance to outrun the sympathies of my readers. Time would fail me to tell of the distresses manifold that fell upon me--of cows dried up by poor milkers; of hens that wouldn't set at all, and hens that, despite all law and reason, would set on one egg; of hens that, having hatched families, straightway led them into all manner of high grass and weeds, by which means numerous young chicks caught premature colds and perished; and how, when I, with manifold toil, had driven one of these inconsiderate gadders into a coop, to teach her domestic habits, the rats came down upon her and slew every chick in one night; how my pigs were always practicing gymnastic exercises over the fence of the sty, and marauding in the garden. I wonder that Fourier never

conceived the idea of having his garden land ploughed by pigs; for certainly they manifest quite a decided elective attraction for turning up the earth.

When autumn came, I went soberly to market, in the neighboring city, and bought my potatoes and turnips like any other man; for, between all the various systems of gardening pursued, I was obliged to confess that my first horticultural effort was a decided failure. But though all my rural visions had proved illusive, there were some very substantial realities. My bill at the seed store, for seeds, roots, and tools, for example, had run up to an amount that was perfectly unaccountable; then there were various smaller items, such as horseshoeing, carriage mending--for he who lives in the country and does business in the city must keep his vehicle and appurtenances. I had always prided myself on being an exact man, and settling every account, great and small, with the going out of the old year; but this season I found myself sorely put to it. In fact, had not I received a timely lift from my good old uncle, I should have made a complete breakdown. The old gentleman's troublesome habit of ciphering and calculating, it seems, had led him beforehand to foresee that I was not exactly in the money-making line, nor likely to possess much surplus revenue to meet the note which I had given for my place; and, therefore, he quietly paid it himself, as I discovered, when, after much anxiety and some sleepless nights, I went to the holder to ask for an extension of credit.

"He was right, after all," said I to my wife; "'to live cheap in the country, a body must know how.'"

To consider:

1. What are the major stylistic features of Stowe's story?
2. What are the themes and messages of the story?
3. To what extent is this story an example of nineteenth-century narrative realism?

Herman Melville (1819-1891) was an American author, best known for his novel *Moby Dick*. Melville was not a successful writer during his lifetime, and some scholars see an autobiographical element in “The Fiddler,” in the character whose poetry has received negative reviews.

Herman Melville, “The Fiddler”

SO my poem is damned, and immortal fame is not for me! I am nobody forever and ever. Intolerable fate!

Snatching my hat, I dashed down the criticism and rushed out into Broadway, where enthusiastic throngs were crowding to a circus in a side-street nearby, very recently started, and famous for a capital clown.

Presently my old friend Standard rather boisterously accosted me.

"Well met, Helmstone, my boy! Ah! what's the matter? Haven't been committing murder? Ain't flying justice? You look wild!"

"You have seen it, then!" said I, of course referring to the criticism.

"Oh, yes; I was there at the morning performance. Great clown, I assure you. But here comes Hautboy. Hautboy—Helmstone."

Without having time or inclination to resent so mortifying a mistake, I was instantly soothed as I gazed on the face of the new acquaintance so unceremoniously introduced. His person was short and full, with a juvenile, animated cast to it. His complexion rurally ruddy; his eye sincere, cheery, and gray. His hair alone betrayed that he was not an overgrown boy. From his hair I set him down as forty or more.

"Come, Standard," he gleefully cried to my friend, "are you not going to the circus? The clown is inimitable, they say. Come, Mr. Helmstone, too—come both; and circus over, we'll take a nice stew and punch at Taylor's."

The sterling content, good-humor, and extraordinary ruddy, sincere expression of this most singular new acquaintance acted upon me like magic. It seemed mere loyalty to human nature to accept an invitation from so unmistakably kind and honest a heart.

During the circus performance I kept my eye more on Hautboy than on the celebrated clown. Hautboy was the sight for me. Such genuine enjoyment as his struck me to the soul with a sense of the reality of the thing called happiness. The jokes of the clown he seemed to roll under his tongue as ripe magnum-bonums [from Latin for great good, the term refers to a type of plum]. Now the foot, now the hand, was employed to attest his grateful applause. At any hit more than ordinary, he turned upon Standard and me to see if his rare pleasure was shared. In a man of forty I saw a boy of twelve; and this too without the slightest abatement of my respect. Because all was so honest and natural, every expression and attitude so graceful with genuine good-nature, that the marvelous juvenility of Hautboy assumed a sort of divine and immortal air, like that of some forever youthful god of Greece.

But much as I gazed upon Hautboy, and much as I admired his air, yet that desperate mood in which I had first rushed from the house had not so entirely departed as not to molest me with momentary returns. But from these relapses I would rouse myself, and swiftly glance round the broad amphitheatre of eagerly interested and all-applauding human faces. Hark! claps, thumps, deafening huzzas; the vast assembly seemed frantic with acclamation; and what, mused I, has caused all this? Why, the clown only comically grinned with one of his extra grins.

Then I repeated in my mind that sublime passage in my poem, in which Cleothes the Argive [from the city of Argos in ancient Greece] vindicates the justice of the war. Ay, ay, thought I to myself, did I now leap into the ring there, and repeat that identical passage, nay, enact the whole tragic poem before them, would they applaud the poet as they applaud the clown? No! They would hoot me, and call me doting or mad. Then what does this prove? Your infatuation or their insensibility? Perhaps both; but indubitably the first. But why wail? Do you seek admiration from the admirers of a buffoon? Call to mind the saying of the Athenian, who, when the people vociferously applauded in the forum, asked his friend in a whisper, what foolish thing had he said? [“The saying of the Athenian” can be found in Plutarch’s *Life of Phocion*.]

Again my eye swept the circus, and fell on the ruddy radiance of the countenance of Hautboy. But its clear honest cheeriness disdained my disdain. My intolerant

pride was rebuked. And yet Hautboy dreamed not what magic reproof to a soul like mine sat on his laughing brow. At the very instant I felt the dart of the censure, his eye twinkled, his hand waved, his voice was lifted in jubilant delight at another joke of the inexhaustible clown.

Circus over, we went to Taylor's. Among crowds of others, we sat down to our stews and punches at one of the small marble tables. Hautboy sat opposite to me. Though greatly subdued from its former hilarity, his face still shone with gladness. But added to this was a quality not so prominent before; a certain serene expression of leisurely, deep good sense. Good sense and good humor in him joined hands. As the conversation proceeded between the brisk Standard and him—for I said little or nothing—I was more and more struck with the excellent judgment he evinced. In most of his remarks upon a variety of topics Hautboy seemed intuitively to hit the exact line between enthusiasm and apathy. It was plain that while Hautboy saw the world pretty much as it was, yet he did not theoretically espouse its bright side nor its dark side. Rejecting all solutions, he but acknowledged facts. What was sad in the world he did not superficially gainsay; what was glad in it he did not cynically slur; and all which was to him personally enjoyable, he gratefully took to his heart. It was plain, then—so it seemed at that moment, at least—that his extraordinary cheerfulness did not arise either from deficiency of feeling or thought.

Suddenly remembering an engagement, he took up his hat, bowed pleasantly, and left us.

"Well, Helmstone," said Standard, inaudibly drumming on the slab, "what do you think of your new acquaintance?"

The last two words tingled with a peculiar and novel significance.

"New acquaintance indeed," echoed I.

"Standard, I owe you a thousand thanks for introducing me to one of the most singular men I have ever seen. It needed the optical sight of such a man to believe in the possibility of his existence."

"You rather like him, then," said Standard, with ironical dryness.

"I hugely love and admire him, Standard. I wish I were Hautboy."

"Ah? That's a pity now. There's only one Hautboy in the world."

This last remark set me to pondering again, and somehow it revived my dark mood.

"His wonderful cheerfulness, I suppose," said I, sneering with spleen, "originates not less in a felicitous fortune than in a felicitous temper. His great good sense is apparent; but great good sense may exist without sublime endowments. Nay, I take it, in certain cases, that good sense is simply owing to the absence of those. Much more, cheerfulness. Unpossessed of genius, Hautboy is eternally blessed."

"Ah? You would not think him an extraordinary genius then?"

"Genius? What! Such a short, fat fellow a genius! Genius, like Cassius, is lank." [a reference to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "Yond' Cassius has a lean and hungry look, He thinks too much; such men are dangerous."]

"Ah? But could you not fancy that Hautboy might formerly have had genius, but luckily getting rid of it, at last fatted up?"

"For a genius to get rid of his genius is as impossible as for a man in the galloping consumption to get rid of that."

"Ah? You speak very decidedly."

"Yes, Standard," cried I, increasing in spleen, "your cheery Hautboy, after all, is no pattern, no lesson for you and me. With average abilities; opinions clear, because circumscribed; passions docile, because they are feeble; a temper hilarious, because he was born to it—how can your Hautboy be made a reasonable example to a heady fellow like you, or an ambitious dreamer like me? Nothing tempts him beyond common limit; in himself he has nothing to restrain. By constitution he is exempted from all moral harm. Could ambition but prick him; had he but once heard applause, or endured contempt, a very different man would your Hautboy be. Acquiescent and calm from the cradle to the grave, he obviously slides through the crowd."

"Ah?"

"Why do you say *ah* to me so strangely whenever I speak?"

"Did you ever hear of Master Betty?" [an acclaimed young boy actor of the early nineteenth century]]

"The great English prodigy, who long ago ousted the Siddons and the Kembles [the famous actress Sarah Siddons and the theater manager John Philip Kemble of London stage fame] from Drury Lane, and made the whole town run mad with acclamation?"

"The same," said Standard, once more inaudibly drumming on the slab.

I looked at him perplexed. He seemed to be holding the master-key of our theme in mysterious reserve; seemed to be throwing out his Master Betty too, to puzzle me only the more.

"What under heaven can Master Betty, the great genius and prodigy, an English boy twelve years old, have to do with the poor commonplace plodder Hautboy, an American of forty?"

"Oh, nothing in the least. I don't imagine that they ever saw each other. Besides, Master Betty must be dead and buried long ere this."

"Then why cross the ocean, and rifle the grave to drag his remains into this living discussion?"

"Absent-mindedness, I suppose. I humbly beg pardon. Proceed with your observations on Hautboy. You think he never had genius, quite too contented and happy, and fat for that ah? You think him no pattern for men in general? affording no lesson of value to neglected merit, genius ignored, or impotent presumption rebuked? all of which three amount to much the same thing. You admire his cheerfulness, while scorning his commonplace soul. Poor Hautboy, how sad that your very cheerfulness should, by a by-blow, bring you despite!"

"I don't say I scorn him; you are unjust. I simply declare that he is no pattern for me."

A sudden noise at my side attracted my ear. Turning, I saw Hautboy again, who very blithely reseated himself on the chair he had left.

"I was behind time with my engagement," said Hautboy, "so thought I would run back and rejoin you. But come, you have sat long enough here. Let us go to my rooms. It is only five minutes' walk."

"If you will promise to fiddle for us, we will," said Standard.

Fiddle! thought I—he's a jigebob *fiddler* then? No wonder genius declines to measure its pace to a fiddler's bow. My spleen was very strong on me now.

"I will gladly fiddle you your fill," replied Hautboy to Standard. "Come on."

In a few minutes we found ourselves in the fifth story of a sort of storehouse, in a lateral street to Broadway. It was curiously furnished with all sorts of odd furniture which seemed to have been obtained, piece by piece, at auctions of old-fashioned household stuff. But all was charmingly clean and cosy.

Pressed by Standard, Hautboy forthwith got out his dented old fiddle, and sitting down on a tall rickety stool, played away right merrily at Yankee Doodle and other off-handed, dashing, and disdainfully care-free airs. But common as were the tunes, I was transfixed by something miraculously superior in the style. Sitting there on the old stool, his rusty hat sideways cocked on his head, one foot dangling adrift, he plied the bow of an enchanter. All my moody discontent, every vestige of peevishness fled. My whole splenetic soul capitulated to the magical fiddle.

"Something of an Orpheus, ah?" said Standard, archly nudging me beneath the left rib. [Orpheus was the mythical Greek poet whose music could charm the beasts.]

"And I, the charmed Bruin," murmured I.

The fiddle ceased. Once more, with redoubled curiosity, I gazed upon the easy, indifferent Hautboy. But he entirely baffled inquisition.

When, leaving him, Standard and I were in the street once more, I earnestly conjured him to tell me who, in sober truth, this marvelous Hautboy was.

"Why, haven't you seen him? And didn't you yourself lay his whole anatomy open on the marble slab at Taylor's? What more can you possibly learn? Doubtless your own masterly insight has already put you in possession of all."

"You mock me, Standard. There is some mystery here. Tell me, I entreat you, who is Hautboy?"

"An extraordinary genius, Helmstone," said Standard, with sudden ardor, "who in boyhood drained the whole flagon of glory; whose going from city to city was a going from triumph to triumph. One who has been an object of wonder to the wisest, been caressed by the loveliest, received the open homage of thousands on thousands of the rabble. But today he walks Broadway and no man knows him.

With you and me, the elbow of the hurrying clerk, and the pole of the remorseless omnibus, shove him. He who has a hundred times been crowned with laurels, now wears, as you see, a bunged beaver. Once fortune poured showers of gold into his lap, as showers of laurel leaves upon his brow. To-day, from house to house he hies, teaching fiddling for a living. Crammed once with fame, he is now hilarious without it. *With* genius and *without* fame, he is happier than a king. More a prodigy now than ever."

"His true name?"

"Let me whisper it in your ear."

"What! Oh Standard, myself, as a child, have shouted myself hoarse applauding that very name in the theatre."

"I have heard your poem was not very handsomely received," said Standard, now suddenly shifting the subject.

"Not a word of that, for heaven's sake!" cried I. "If Cicero, traveling in the East, found sympathetic solace for his grief in beholding the arid overthrow of a once gorgeous city, shall not my petty affair be as nothing, when I behold in Hautboy the vine and the rose climbing the shattered shafts of his tumbled temple of Fame?"

Next day I tore all my manuscripts, bought me a fiddle, and went to take regular lessons of Hautboy.

To consider:

1. Who are the main characters of the story? How does each figure in the plot and in the narration proper?
2. Is there a symbolic function to the allusions to the circus?
3. How is Hautboy portrayed?
4. What are the themes and messages of the story?
5. To what extent is irony present in "The Fiddler"?

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) was a Scottish writer best known for his creation of the detective Sherlock Holmes. He published four novels and over fifty short stories.

Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Story of B24”

I told my story when I was taken, and no one would listen to me. Then I told it again at the trial—the whole thing absolutely as it happened, without so much as a word added. I set it all out truly, so help me God, all that Lady Mannering said and did, and then all that I had said and done, just as it occurred. And what did I get for it? “The prisoner put forward a rambling and inconsequential statement, incredible in its details, and unsupported by any shred of corroborative evidence.” That was what one of the London papers said, and others let it pass as if I had made no defence at all. And yet, with my own eyes I saw Lord Mannering murdered, and I am as guiltless of it as any man on the jury that tried me.

Now, sir, you are there to receive the petitions of prisoners. It all lies with you. All I ask is that you read it—just read it—and then that you make an inquiry or two about the private character of this “lady” Mannering, if she still keeps the name that she had three years ago, when to my sorrow and ruin I came to meet her. You could use a private inquiry agent or a good lawyer, and you would soon learn enough to show you that my story is the true one. Think of the glory it would be to you to have all the papers saying that there would have been a shocking miscarriage of justice if it had not been for your perseverance and intelligence! That must be your reward, since I am a poor man and can offer you nothing. But if you don’t do it, may you never lie easy in your bed again! May no night pass that you are not haunted by the thought of the man who rots in gaol because you have not done the duty which you are paid to do! But you will do it, sir, I know. Just make one or two inquiries, and you will soon find which way the wind blows. Remember, also, that the only person who profited by the crime was herself, since it changed her from an unhappy wife to a rich young widow. There’s the end of the string in your hand, and you only have to follow it up and see where it leads to.

Mind you, sir, I make no complaint as far as the burglary goes. I don’t whine about what I have deserved, and so far I have had no more than I have deserved.

Burglary it was, right enough, and my three years have gone to pay for it. It was

shown at the trial that I had had a hand in the Merton Cross business, and did a year for that, so my story had the less attention on that account. A man with a previous conviction never gets a really fair trial. I own to the burglary, but when it comes to the murder which brought me a lifer—any judge but Sir James might have given me the gallows—then I tell you that I had nothing to do with it, and that I am an innocent man. And now I'll take that night, the 13th of September, 1894, and I'll give you just exactly what occurred, and may God's hand strike me down if I go one inch over the truth.

I had been at Bristol in the summer looking for work, and then I had a notion that I might get something at Portsmouth, for I was trained as a skilled mechanic, so I came tramping my way across the south of England, and doing odd jobs as I went. I was trying all I knew to keep off the cross, for I had done a year in Exeter Gaol, and I had had enough of visiting Queen Victoria. But it's cruel hard to get work when once the black mark is against your name, and it was all I could do to keep soul and body together. At last, after ten days of wood-cutting and stone-breaking on starvation pay, I found myself near Salisbury with a couple of shillings in my pocket, and my boots and my patience clean wore out. There's an alehouse called "The Willing Mind," which stands on the road between Blandford and Salisbury, and it was there that night I engaged a bed. I was sitting alone in the taproom just about closing time, when the inn-keeper—Allen his name was—came beside me and began yarning about the neighbours. He was a man that liked to talk and to have someone to listen to his talk, so I sat there smoking and drinking a mug of ale which he had stood me; and I took no great interest in what he said until he began to talk (as the devil would have it) about the riches of Mannering Hall. "Meaning the large house on the right before I came to the village?" said I. "The one that stands in its own park?"

"Exactly," said he—and I am giving all our talk so that you may know that I am telling you the truth and hiding nothing. "The long white house with the pillars," said he. "At the side of the Blandford Road."

Now I had looked at it as I passed, and it had crossed my mind, as such thoughts will, that it was a very easy house to get into with that great row of grand windows and glass doors. I had put the thought away from me, and now here was this landlord bringing it back with his talk about the riches within. I said nothing, but I listened, and as luck would have it, he would always come back to this one subject. "He was a miser young, so you can think what he is now in his age," said he. "Well, he's had some good out of his money."

“What good can he have had if he does not spend it?” said I.

“Well, it bought him the prettiest wife in England, and that was some good that he got out of it. She thought she would have the spending of it, but she knows the difference now.”

“Who was she then?” I asked, just for the sake of something to say.

“She was nobody at all until the old Lord made her his Lady,” said he. “She came from up London way, and some said that she had been on the stage there, but nobody knew. The old Lord was away for a year, and when he came home he brought a young wife back with him, and there she has been ever since. Stephens, the butler, did tell me once that she was the light of the house when first she came, but what with her husband’s mean and aggravatin’ way, and what with her loneliness—for he hates to see a visitor within his doors; and what with his bitter words—for he has a tongue like a hornet’s sting, her life all went out of her, and she became a white, silent creature, moping about the country lanes. Some say that she loved another man, and that it was just the riches of the old Lord which tempted her to be false to her lover, and that now she is eating her heart out because she has lost the one without being any nearer to the other, for she might be the poorest woman in the parish for all the money that she has the handling of.”

Well, sir, you can imagine that it did not interest me very much to hear about the quarrels between a Lord and a Lady. What did it matter to me if she hated the sound of his voice, or if he put every indignity upon her in the hope of breaking her spirit, and spoke to her as he would never have dared to speak to one of his servants? The landlord told me of these things, and of many more like them, but they passed out of my mind, for they were no concern of mine. But what I did want to hear was the form in which Lord Mannering kept his riches. Title-deeds and stock certificates are but paper, and more danger than profit to the man who takes them. But metal and stones are worth a risk. And then, as if he were answering my very thoughts, the landlord told me of Lord Mannering’s great collection of gold medals, that it was the most valuable in the world, and that it was reckoned that if they were put into a sack the strongest man in the parish would not be able to raise them. Then his wife called him, and he and I went to our beds.

I am not arguing to make out a case for myself, but I beg you, sir, to bear all the facts in your mind, and to ask yourself whether a man could be more sorely tempted than I was. I make bold to say that there are few who could have held out against it. There I lay on my bed that night, a desperate man without hope or work, and with my last shilling in my pocket. I had tried to be honest, and honest folk had

turned their backs upon me. They taunted me for theft; and yet they pushed me towards it. I was caught in the stream and could not get out. And then it was such a chance: the great house all lined with windows, the golden medals which could so easily be melted down. It was like putting a loaf before a starving man and expecting him not to eat it. I fought against it for a time, but it was no use. At last I sat up on the side of my bed, and I swore that that night I should either be a rich man and able to give up crime forever, or that the irons should be on my wrists once more. Then I slipped on my clothes, and, having put a shilling on the table—for the landlord had treated me well, and I did not wish to cheat him—I passed out through the window into the garden of the inn.

There was a high wall round this garden, and I had a job to get over it, but once on the other side it was all plain sailing. I did not meet a soul upon the road, and the iron gate of the avenue was open. No one was moving at the lodge. The moon was shining, and I could see the great house glimmering white through an archway of trees. I walked up it for a quarter of a mile or so, until I was at the edge of the drive, where it ended in a broad, gravelled space before the main door. There I stood in the shadow and looked at the long building, with a full moon shining in every window and silvering the high stone front. I crouched there for some time, and I wondered where I should find the easiest entrance. The corner window of the side seemed to be the one which was least overlooked, and a screen of ivy hung heavily over it. My best chance was evidently there. I worked my way under the trees to the back of the house, and then crept along in the black shadow of the building. A dog barked and rattled his chain, but I stood waiting until he was quiet, and then I stole on once more until I came to the window which I had chosen. It is astonishing how careless they are in the country, in places far removed from large towns, where the thought of burglars never enters their heads. I call it setting temptation in a poor man's way when he puts his hand, meaning no harm, upon a door, and finds it swing open before him. In this case it was not so bad as that, but the window was merely fastened with the ordinary catch, which I opened with a push from the blade of my knife. I pulled up the window as quickly as possible, then I thrust the knife through the slit in the shutter and prized it open. They were folding shutters, and I shoved them before me and walked into the room. "Good evening, sir! You are very welcome!" said a voice.

I've had some starts in my life, but never one to come up to that one. There, in the opening of the shutters, within reach of my arm, was standing a woman with a small coil of wax taper burning in her hand. She was tall and straight and slender, with a beautiful white face that might have been cut out of clear marble, but her hair and eyes were as black as night. She was dressed in some sort of white

dressing-gown which flowed down to her feet, and what with this robe and what with her face, it seemed as if a spirit from above was standing in front of me. My knees knocked together, and I held on to the shutter with one hand to give me support. I should have turned and run away if I had had the strength, but I could only just stand and stare at her.

She soon brought me back to myself once more.

“Don’t be frightened!” said she, and they were strange words for the mistress of a house to have to use to a burglar. “I saw you out of my bedroom window when you were hiding under those trees, so I slipped downstairs, and then I heard you at the window. I should have opened it for you if you had waited, but you managed it yourself just as I came up.”

I still held in my hand the long clasp-knife with which I had opened the shutter. I was unshaven and grimed from a week on the roads. Altogether, there are few people who would have cared to face me alone at one in the morning; but this woman, if I had been her lover meeting her by appointment, could not have looked upon me with a more welcoming eye. She laid her hand upon my sleeve and drew me into the room.

“What’s the meaning of this, ma’am? Don’t get trying any little games upon me,” said I, in my roughest way—and I can put it on rough when I like. “It’ll be the worse for you if you play me any trick,” I added, showing her my knife.

“I will play you no trick,” said she. “On the contrary, I am your friend, and I wish to help you.”

“Excuse me, ma’am, but I find it hard to believe that,” said I. “Why should you wish to help me?”

“I have my own reasons,” said she; and then suddenly, with those black eyes blazing out of her white face: “It’s because I hate him, hate him, hate him! Now you understand.”

I remembered what the landlord had told me, and I did understand. I looked at her Ladyship’s face, and I knew that I could trust her. She wanted to revenge herself upon her husband. She wanted to hit him where it would hurt him most—upon the pocket. She hated him so that she would even lower her pride to take such a man as me into her confidence if she could gain her end by doing so. I’ve hated some folk

in my time, but I don't think I ever understood what hate was until I saw that woman's face in the light of the taper.

"You'll trust me now?" said she, with another coaxing touch upon my sleeve.

"Yes, your Ladyship."

"You know me, then?"

"I can guess who you are."

"I dare say my wrongs are the talk of the county. But what does he care for that? He only cares for one thing in the whole world, and that you can take from him this night. Have you a bag?"

"No, your Ladyship."

"Shut the shutter behind you. Then no one can see the light. You are quite safe. The servants all sleep in the other wing. I can show you where all the most valuable things are. You cannot carry them all, so we must pick the best."

The room in which I found myself was long and low, with many rugs and skins scattered about on a polished wood floor. Small cases stood here and there, and the walls were decorated with spears and swords and paddles, and other things which find their way into museums. There were some queer clothes, too, which had been brought from savage countries, and the lady took down a large leather sack-bag from among them.

"This sleeping-sack will do," said she. "Now come with me and I will show you where the medals are."

It was like a dream to me to think that this tall, white woman was the lady of the house, and that she was lending me a hand to rob her own home. I could have burst out laughing at the thought of it, and yet there was something in that pale face of hers which stopped my laughter and turned me cold and serious. She swept on in front of me like a spirit, with the green taper in her hand, and I walked behind with my sack until we came to a door at the end of this museum. It was locked, but the key was in it, and she led me through.

The room beyond was a small one, hung all round with curtains which had pictures

on them. It was the hunting of a deer that was painted on it, as I remember, and in the flicker of that light you'd have sworn that the dogs and the horses were streaming round the walls. The only other thing in the room was a row of cases made of walnut, with brass ornaments. They had glass tops, and beneath this glass I saw the long lines of those gold medals, some of them as big as a plate and half an inch thick, all resting upon red velvet and glowing and gleaming in the darkness. My fingers were just itching to be at them, and I slipped my knife under the lock of one of the cases to wrench it open.

“Wait a moment,” said she, laying her hand upon my arm. “You might do better than this.”

“I am very well satisfied, ma'am,” said I, “and much obliged to your Ladyship for kind assistance.”

“You can do better,” she repeated. “Would not golden sovereigns be worth more to you than these things?”

“Why, yes,” said I. “That's best of all.”

“Well,” said she. “He sleeps just above our head. It is but one short staircase. There is a tin box with money enough to fill this bag under his bed.”

“How can I get it without waking him?”

“What matter if he does wake?” She looked very hard at me as she spoke. “You could keep him from calling out.”

“No, no, ma'am, I'll have none of that.”

“Just as you like,” said she. “I thought that you were a stout-hearted sort of man by your appearance, but I see that I made a mistake. If you are afraid to run the risk of one old man, then of course you cannot have the gold which is under his bed. You are the best judge of your own business, but I should think that you would do better at some other trade.”

“I'll not have murder on my conscience.”

“You could overpower him without harming him. I never said anything about murder. The money lies under the bed. But if you are faint-hearted, it is better that

you should not attempt it.”

She worked upon me so, partly with her scorn and partly with this money that she held before my eyes, that I believe I should have yielded and taken my chances upstairs, had it not been that I saw her eyes following the struggle within me in such a crafty, malignant fashion, that it was evident she was bent upon making me the tool of her revenge, and that she would leave me no choice but to do the old man an injury or to be captured by him. She felt suddenly that she was giving herself away, and she changed her face to a kindly, friendly smile, but it was too late, for I had had my warning.

“I will not go upstairs,” said I. “I have all I want here.”

She looked her contempt at me, and there never was a face which could look it plainer.

“Very good. You can take these medals. I should be glad if you would begin at this end. I suppose they will all be the same value when melted down, but these are the ones which are the rarest, and therefore, the most precious to him. It is not necessary to break the locks. If you press that brass knob you will find that there is a secret spring. So! Take that small one first—it is the very apple of his eye.”

She had opened one of the cases, and the beautiful things all lay exposed before me. I had my hand upon the one which she had pointed out, when suddenly a change came over her face, and she held up one finger as a warning. “Hist!” she whispered. “What is that?”

Far away in the silence of the house we heard a low, dragging, shuffling sound, and the distant tread of feet. She closed and fastened the case in an instant.

“It’s my husband!” she whispered. “All right. Don’t be alarmed. I’ll arrange it. Here! Quick, behind the tapestry!”

She pushed me behind the painted curtains upon the wall, my empty leather bag still in my hand. Then she took her taper and walked quickly into the room from which we had come. From where I stood I could see her through the open door.

“Is that you, Robert?” she cried.

The light of a candle shone through the door of the museum, and the shuffling

steps came nearer. Then I saw a face in the doorway, a great, heavy face, all lines and creases, with a huge curving nose, and a pair of gold glasses fixed across it. He had to throw his head back to see through the glasses, and that great nose thrust out in front of him like the beak of some sort of fowl. He was a big man, very tall and burly, so that in his loose dressing-gown his figure seemed to fill up the whole doorway. He had a pile of grey, curling hair all round his head, but his face was clean-shaven. His mouth was thin and small and prim, hidden away under his long, masterful nose. He stood there, holding the candle in front of him, and looking at his wife with a queer, malicious gleam in his eyes. It only needed that one look to tell me that he was as fond of her as she was of him.

“How’s this?” he asked. “Some new tantrum? What do you mean by wandering about the house? Why don’t you go to bed?”

“I could not sleep,” she answered. She spoke languidly and wearily. If she was an actress once, she had not forgotten her calling.

“Might I suggest,” said he, in the same mocking kind of voice, “that a good conscience is an excellent aid to sleep?”

“That cannot be true,” she answered, “for you sleep very well.”

“I have only one thing in my life to be ashamed of,” said he, and his hair bristled up with anger until he looked like an old cockatoo. “You know best what that is. It is a mistake which has brought its own punishment with it.”

“To me as well as to you. Remember that!”

“You have very little to whine about. It was I who stooped and you who rose.”

“Rose!”

“Yes, rose. I suppose you do not deny that it is a promotion to exchange the music-hall for Mannering Hall. Fool that I was ever to take you out of your true sphere!”

“If you think so, why do you not separate?”

“Because private misery is better than public humiliation. Because it is easier to suffer for a mistake than to own to it. Because also I like to keep you in my sight, and to know that you cannot go back to him.”

“You villain! You cowardly villain!”

“Yes, yes, my lady. I know your secret ambition, but it shall never be while I live, and if it happens after my death I will at least take care that you go to him as a beggar. You and dear Edward will never have the satisfaction of squandering my savings, and you may make up your mind to that, my lady. Why are those shutters and the window open?”

“I found the night very close.”

“It is not safe. How do you know that some tramp may not be outside? Are you aware that my collection of medals is worth more than any similar collection in the world? You have left the door open also. What is there to prevent anyone from rifling the cases?”

“I was here.”

“I know you were. I heard you moving about in the medal room, and that was why I came down. What were you doing?”

“Looking at the medals. What else should I be doing?”

“This curiosity is something new.” He looked suspiciously at her and moved on towards the inner room, she walking beside him.

It was at this moment that I saw something which startled. I had laid my clasp-knife open upon the top of one of the cases, and there it lay in full view. She saw it before he did, and with a woman’s cunning she held her taper out so that the light of it came between Lord Mannering’s eyes and the knife. Then she took it with her left hand and held it against her gown out of his sight. He looked about from case to case—I could have put my hand at one time upon his long nose—but there was nothing to show that the medals had been tampered with, and so, still snarling and grumbling, he shuffled off into the other room once more.

And now I have to speak of what I heard rather than of what I saw, but I swear to you, as I shall stand some day before my Maker, that what I say is the truth.

When they passed into the outer room I saw him lay his candle upon the corner of one of the tables, and he sat himself down, but in such a position that he was just out of my sight. She moved behind him, as I could tell from the fact that the light

of her taper threw his long, lumpy shadow upon the floor in front of him. Then he began talking about this man whom he called Edward, and every word that he said was like a blistering drop of vitriol. He spoke low, so that I could not hear it all, but from what I heard I should guess that she would as soon have been lashed with a whip. At first she said some hot words in reply, but then she was silent, and he went on and on in that cold, mocking voice of his, nagging and insulting and tormenting, until I wondered that she could bear to stand there in silence and listen to it. Then suddenly I heard him say in a sharp voice, "Come from behind me! Leave go of my collar! What! would you dare to strike me?" There was a sound like a blow, just a soft sort of thud, and then I heard him cry out, "My God, it's blood!" He shuffled with his feet as if he was getting up, and then I heard another blow, and he cried out, "Oh, you she-devil!" and was quiet, except for a dripping and splashing upon the floor.

I ran out from behind my curtain at that, and rushed into the other room, shaking all over with the horror of it. The old man had slipped down in the chair, and his dressing-gown had rucked up until he looked as if he had a monstrous hump to his back. His head, with the gold glasses still fixed on his nose, was lolling over upon one side, and his little mouth was open just like a dead fish. I could not see where the blood was coming from, but I could still hear it drumming upon the floor. She stood behind him with the candle shining full upon her face. Her lips were pressed together and her eyes shining, and a touch of colour had come into each of her cheeks. It just wanted that to make her the most beautiful woman I had ever seen in my life.

"You've done it now!" said I.

"Yes," said she, in her quiet way, "I've done it now."

"What are you going to do?" I asked. "They'll have you for murder as sure as fate."

"Never fear about me. I have nothing to live for, and it does not matter. Give me a hand to set him straight in the chair. It is horrible to see him like this!"

I did so, though it turned me cold all over to touch him. Some of his blood came on my hand and sickened me.

"Now," said she, "you may as well have the medals as anyone else. Take them and go."

“I don’t want them. I only want to get away. I was never mixed up with a business like this before.”

“Nonsense!” said she. “You came for the medals, and here they are at your mercy. Why should you not have them? There is no one to prevent you.”

I held the bag still in my hand. She opened the case, and between us we threw a hundred or so of the medals into it. They were all from the one case, but I could not bring myself to wait for any more. Then I made for the window, for the very air of this house seemed to poison me after what I had seen and heard. As I looked back, I saw her standing there, tall and graceful, with the light in her hand just as I had seen her first. She waved good-bye, and I waved back at her and sprang out into the gravel drive.

I thank God that I can lay my hand upon my heart and say that I have never done a murder, but perhaps it would be different if I had been able to read that woman’s mind and thoughts. There might have been two bodies in the room instead of one if I could have seen behind that last smile of hers. But I thought of nothing but of getting safely away, and it never entered my head how she might be fixing the rope round my neck. I had not taken five steps out from the window skirting down the shadow of the house in the way that I had come, when I heard a scream that might have raised the parish, and then another and another.

“Murder!” she cried. “Murder! Murder! Help!” and her voice rang out in the quiet of the night-time and sounded over the whole country-side. It went through my head, that dreadful cry. In an instant lights began to move and windows to fly up, not only in the house behind me, but at the lodge and in the stables in front. Like a frightened rabbit I bolted down the drive, but I heard the clang of the gate being shut before I could reach it. Then I hid my bag of medals under some dry fagots, and I tried to get away across the park, but someone saw me in the moonlight, and presently I had half a dozen of them with dogs upon my heels. I crouched down among the brambles, but those dogs were too many for me, and I was glad enough when the men came up and prevented me from being torn into pieces. They seized me, and dragged me back to the room from which I had come.

“Is this the man, your Ladyship?” asked the oldest of them—the same whom I found out afterwards to be the butler.

She had been bending over the body, with her handkerchief to her eyes, and now she turned upon me with the face of a fury. Oh, what an actress that woman was!

“Yes, yes, it is the very man,” she cried. “Oh, you villain, you cruel villain, to treat an old man so!”

There was a man there who seemed to be a village constable. He laid his hand upon my shoulder.

“What do you say to that?” said he.

“It was she who did it,” I cried, pointing at the woman, whose eyes never flinched before mine.

“Come! come! Try another!” said the constable, and one of the men-servants struck at me with his fist.

“I tell you that I saw her do it. She stabbed him twice with a knife. She first helped me to rob him, and then she murdered him.”

The footman tried to strike me again, but she held up her hand.

“Do not hurt him,” said she. “I think that his punishment may safely be left to the law.”

“I’ll see to that, your Ladyship,” said the constable. “Your Ladyship actually saw the crime committed, did you not?”

“Yes, yes, I saw it with my own eyes. It was horrible. We heard the noise and we came down. My poor husband was in front. The man had one of the cases open, and was filling a black leather bag which he held in his hand. He rushed past us, and my husband seized him. There was a struggle, and he stabbed him twice. There you can see the blood upon his hands. If I am not mistaken, his knife is still in Lord Mannering’s body.”

“Look at the blood upon her hands!” I cried.

“She has been holding up his Lordship’s head, you lying rascal,” said the butler. “And here’s the very sack her Ladyship spoke of,” said the constable, as a groom came in with the one which I had dropped in my flight. “And here are the medals inside it. That’s good enough for me. We will keep him safe here to-night, and to-morrow the inspector and I can take him into Salisbury.”

“Poor creature,” said the woman. “For my own part, I forgive him any injury which he has done me. Who knows what temptation may have driven him to crime? His conscience and the law will give him punishment enough without any reproach of mine rendering it more bitter.”

I could not answer—I tell you, sir, I could not answer, so taken aback was I by the assurance of the woman. And so, seeming by my silence to agree to all that she had said, I was dragged away by the butler and the constable into the cellar, in which they locked me for the night.

There, sir, I have told you the whole story of the events which led up to the murder of Lord Mannering by his wife upon the night of September the 14th, in the year 1894. Perhaps you will put my statement on one side as the constable did at Mannering Towers, or the judge afterwards at the county assizes. Or perhaps you will see that there is the ring of truth in what I say, and you will follow it up, and so make your name for ever as a man who does not grudge personal trouble where justice is to be done. I have only you to look to, sir, and if you will clear my name of this false accusation, then I will worship you as one man never yet worshipped another. But if you fail me, then I give you my solemn promise that I will rope myself up, this day month, to the bar of my window, and from that time on I will come to plague you in your dreams if ever yet one man was able to come back and to haunt another. What I ask you to do is very simple. Make inquiries about this woman, watch her, learn her past history, find out what she is making of the money which has come to her, and whether there is not a man Edward as I have stated. If from all this you learn anything which shows you her real character, or which seems to you to corroborate the story which I have told you, then I am sure that I can rely upon your goodness of heart to come to the rescue of an innocent man.

To consider:

1. Who narrates the story? What does the reader learn about the narrator?
2. How is the narrative structured? Is there a purpose to the narration?
3. What is made clear in the story, and what remains difficult to interpret?
4. Do you find the narrator’s argument convincing?
5. Is this a “traditional” mystery story? If not, why not?
6. Thumbs up or thumbs down? Why?

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) was born in New Zealand and settled in England at the age of nineteen. Best known for her short stories, she was associated with the Bloomsbury group.

Katherine Mansfield, "Miss Brill"

ALTHOUGH it was so brilliantly fine—the blue sky powdered with gold and great spots of light like white wine splashed over the Jardins Publiques—Miss Brill was glad that she had decided on her fur. The air was motionless, but when you opened your mouth there was just a faint chill, like a chill from a glass of iced water before you sip, and now and again a leaf came drifting—from nowhere, from the sky. Miss Brill put up her hand and touched her fur. Dear little thing! It was nice to feel it again. She had taken it out of its box that afternoon, shaken out the moth powder, given it a good brush, and rubbed the life back into the dim little eyes. "What has been happening to me?" said the sad little eyes. Oh, how sweet it was to see them snap at her again from the red eiderdown! . . . But the nose, which was of some black composition, wasn't at all firm. It must have had a knock, somehow. Never mind—a little dab of black sealing-wax when the time came—when it was absolutely necessary . . . Little rogue! Yes, she really felt like that about it. Little rogue biting its tail just by her left ear. She could have taken it off and laid it on her lap and stroked it. She felt a tingling in her hands and arms, but that came from walking, she supposed. And when she breathed, something light and sad—no, not sad, exactly—something gentle seemed to move in her bosom.

There were a number of people out this afternoon, far more than last Sunday. And the band sounded louder and gayer. That was because the Season had begun. For although the band played all the year round on Sundays, out of season it was never the same. It was like someone playing with only the family to listen; it didn't care how it played if there weren't any strangers present. Wasn't the conductor wearing a new coat, too? She was sure it was new. He scraped with his foot and flapped his arms like a rooster about to crow, and the bandsmen sitting in the green rotunda blew out their cheeks and glared at the music. Now there came a little "flutey" bit—very pretty!—a little chain of bright drops. She was sure it would be repeated. It was; she lifted her head and smiled.

Only two people shared her "special" seat: a fine old man in a velvet coat, his hands clasped over a huge carved walking-stick, and a big old woman, sitting upright, with a roll of knitting on her embroidered apron. They did not speak. This was disappointing, for Miss Brill always looked forward to the conversation. She had become really quite expert, she thought, at listening as though she didn't listen, at sitting in other people's lives just for a minute while they talked round her.

She glanced, sideways, at the old couple. Perhaps they would go soon. Last Sunday, too, hadn't been as interesting as usual. An Englishman and his wife, he wearing a dreadful Panama hat and she button boots. And she'd gone on the whole time about how she ought to wear spectacles; she knew she needed them; but that it was no good getting any; they'd be sure to break and they'd never keep on. And he'd been so patient. He'd suggested everything—gold rims, the kind that curve round your ears, little pads inside the bridge. No, nothing would please her. "They'll always be sliding down my nose!" Miss Brill had wanted to shake her.

The old people sat on a bench, still as statues. Never mind, there was always the crowd to watch. To and fro, in front of the flower beds and the band rotunda, the couples and groups paraded, stopped to talk, to greet, to buy a handful of flowers from the old beggar who had his tray fixed to the railings. Little children ran among them, swooping and laughing; little boys with big white silk bows under their chins, little girls, little French dolls, dressed up in velvet and lace. And sometimes a tiny stagerer came suddenly rocking into the open from under the trees, stopped, stared, as suddenly sat down "flop," until its small high-stepping mother, like a young hen, rushed scolding to its rescue. Other people sat on the benches and green chairs, but they were nearly always the same, Sunday after Sunday, and—Miss Brill had often noticed—there was something funny about nearly all of them. They were odd, silent, nearly all old, and from the way they stared they looked as though they'd just come from dark little rooms or even—even cupboards!

Behind the rotunda the slender trees with yellow leaves down drooping, and through them just a line of sea, and beyond the blue sky with gold-veined clouds.

Tum-tum-tum tiddle-um! tiddle-um! tum tiddley-um tum ta! blew the band.

Two young girls in red came by and two young soldiers in blue met them, and they laughed and paired and went off arm-in-arm. Two peasant women with funny straw hats passed, gravely, leading beautiful smoke-coloured donkeys. A cold, pale nun hurried by. A beautiful woman came along and dropped her bunch of violets, and a little boy ran after to hand them to her, and she took them and threw them

away as if they'd been poisoned. Dear me! Miss Brill didn't know whether to admire that or not! And now an ermine toque [a small hat] and a gentleman in gray met just in front of her. He was tall, stiff, dignified, and she was wearing the ermine toque she'd bought when her hair was yellow. Now everything, her hair, her face, even her eyes, was the same colour as the shabby ermine, and her hand, in its cleaned glove, lifted to dab her lips, was a tiny yellowish paw. Oh, she was so pleased to see him—delighted! She rather thought they were going to meet that afternoon. She described where she'd been—everywhere, here, there, along by the sea. The day was so charming—didn't he agree? And wouldn't he, perhaps? . . . But he shook his head, lighted a cigarette, slowly breathed a great deep puff into her face, and even while she was still talking and laughing, flicked the match away and walked on. The ermine toque was alone; she smiled more brightly than ever. But even the band seemed to know what she was feeling and played more softly, played tenderly, and the drum beat, "The Brute! The Brute!" over and over. What would she do? What was going to happen now? But as Miss Brill wondered, the ermine toque turned, raised her hand as though she'd seen someone else, much nicer, just over there, and pattered away. And the band changed again and played more quickly, more gayly than ever, and the old couple on Miss Brill's seat got up and marched away, and such a funny old man with long whiskers hobbled along in time to the music and was nearly knocked over by four girls walking abreast.

Oh, how fascinating it was! How she enjoyed it! How she loved sitting here, watching it all! It was like a play. It was exactly like a play. Who could believe the sky at the back wasn't painted? But it wasn't till a little brown dog trotted on solemn and then slowly trotted off, like a little "theatre" dog, a little dog that had been drugged, that Miss Brill discovered what it was that made it so exciting. They were all on stage. They weren't only the audience, not only looking on; they were acting. Even she had a part and came every Sunday. No doubt somebody would have noticed if she hadn't been there; she was part of the performance after all. How strange she'd never thought of it like that before! And yet it explained why she made such point of starting from home at just the same time each week—so as not to be late for the performance—and it also explained why she had a queer, shy feeling at telling her English pupils how she spent her Sunday afternoons. No wonder! Miss Brill nearly laughed out loud. She was on the stage. She thought of the old invalid gentleman to whom she read the newspaper four afternoons a week while he slept in the garden. She had got quite used to the frail head on the cotton pillow, the hollowed eyes, the open mouth and the high pinched nose. If he'd been dead she mightn't have noticed for weeks; she wouldn't have minded. But suddenly he knew he was having the paper read to him by an actress! "An actress!" The old head lifted; two points of light quivered in the old eyes. "An actress—are ye?" And

Miss Brill smoothed the newspaper as though it were the manuscript of her part and said gently; "Yes, I have been an actress for a long time."

The band had been having a rest. Now they started again. And what they played was warm, sunny, yet there was just a faint chill—a something, what was it?—not sadness—no, not sadness—a something that made you want to sing. The tune lifted, lifted, the light shone; and it seemed to Miss Brill that in another moment all of hem, all the whole company, would begin singing. The young ones, the laughing ones who were moving together, they would begin and the men's voices, very resolute and brave, would join them. And then she too, she too, and the others on the benches—they would come in with a kind of accompaniment—something low, that scarcely rose or fell, something so beautiful—moving. . . . And Miss Brill's eyes filled with tears and she looked smiling at all the other members of the company. Yes, we understand, we understand, she thought—though what they understood she didn't know.

Just at that moment a boy and girl came and sat down where the old couple had been. They were beautifully dressed; they were in love. The hero and heroine, of course, just arrived from his father's yacht. And still soundlessly singing, still with that trembling smile, Miss Brill prepared to listen.

"No, not now," said the girl. "Not here, I can't."

"But why? Because of that stupid old thing at the end there?" asked the boy. "Why does she come here at all—who wants her? Why doesn't she keep her silly old mug at home?"

"It's her fu-ur which is so funny," giggled the girl. "It's exactly like a fried whiting."

"Ah, be off with you!" said the boy in an angry whisper. Then: "Tell me, ma petite chère—"

"No, not here," said the girl. "Not yet."

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On her way home she usually bought a slice of honeycake at the baker's. It was her Sunday treat. Sometimes there was an almond in her slice, sometimes not. It made a great difference. If there was an almond it was like carrying home a tiny present—a surprise—something that might very well not have been there. She hurried on the

almond Sundays and struck the match for the kettle in quite a dashing way.

But today she passed the baker's by, climbed the stairs, went into the little dark room—her room like a cupboard—and sat down on the red eiderdown. She sat there for a long time. The box that the fur came out of was on the bed. She unclasped the necklet quickly; quickly, without looking, laid it inside. But when she put the lid on she thought she heard something crying.

1. How does Mansfield treat point of view in “Miss Brill”?
2. How does the story portray Miss Brill?
3. Are there symbolic elements in the story?
4. Is there a message in the story?