# SNAPSHOTS

## Supplementary Reader in English for Class XI (Core Course)

11073

राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING



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# Foreword

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005, recommends that children's life at school must be linked to their life outside the school. This principle marks a departure from the legacy of bookish learning which continues to shape our system and causes a gap between the school, home and community. The syllabi and textbooks developed on the basis of NCF signify an attempt to implement this basic idea. They also attempt to discourage rote learning and the maintenance of sharp boundaries between different subject areas. We hope these measures will take us significantly further in the direction of a child-centred system of education outlined in the National Policy of Education (1986).

The success of this effort depends on the steps that school principals and teachers will take to encourage children to reflect on their own learning and to pursue imaginative activities and questions. We must recognise that, given space, time and freedom, children generate new knowledge by engaging with the information passed on to them by adults. Treating the prescribed textbook as the sole basis of examination is one of the key reasons why other resources and sites of learning are ignored. Inculcating creativity and initiative is possible if we perceive and treat children as participants in learning, not as receivers of a fixed body of knowledge.

These aims imply considerable change in school routines and mode of functioning. Flexibility in the daily time-table is as necessary as rigour in implementing the annual calendar so that the required number of teaching days are actually devoted to teaching. The methods used for teaching and evaluation will also determine how effective this supplementary reader proves for making children's life at school a happy experience, rather than a source of stress or boredom. Syllabus designers have tried to address the problem of curricular burden by restructuring and reorienting knowledge at different stages with greater consideration for child psychology and the time available for teaching. The book attempts to enhance this endeavour by giving higher priority and space to opportunities for contemplation and wondering, discussion in small groups, and activities requiring hands-on experience.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) appreciates the hard work done by the textbook development committee responsible for this book. We wish to thank the Chairperson of the advisory group in languages, Professor Namwar Singh and the Chief Advisor for this book, Professor R. Amritavalli for guiding the work of this committee. Several

teachers contributed to the development of this book; we are grateful to their principals for making this possible. We are indebted to the institutions and organisations which have generously permitted us to draw upon their resources, materials and personnel. We are especially grateful to the members of the National Monitoring Committee, appointed by the Department of Secondary and Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development under the Chairpersonship of Professor Mrinal Miri and Professor G.P. Deshpande for their valuable time and contribution. As an organisation committed to systemic reform and continuous improvement in the quality of its products, NCERT welcomes comments and suggestions which will enable us to undertake further revision and refinements.

*Director*
National Council of Educational
Research and Training

New Delhi
*20 December 2005*

# Rationalisation of Content in the Textbooks

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to reduce content load on students. The National Education Policy 2020, also emphasises reducing the content load and providing opportunities for experiential learning with creative mindset. In this background, the NCERT has undertaken the exercise to rationalise the textbooks across all classes. Learning Outcomes already developed by the NCERT across classes have been taken into consideration in this exercise.

**Contents of the textbooks have been rationalised in view of the following:**

- Content based on genres of literature in the textbooks and supplementary readers at different stages of school education.
- Content that is meant for achieving Learning Outcomes for developing language proficiency and is accessible at different stages.
- For reducing the curriculum load and examination stress in view of the prevailing condition of Pandemic.
- Content, which is easily accessible to students without much interventions from teachers and can be learned by children through self-learning or peer-learning
- Content, which is irrelevant in the present context

This present edition, is a reformatted version after carrying out the changes given above.

# About the Book

THIS supplementary reader, based on the English syllabus for Class XI, is prepared on the lines suggested by the National Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2005.

For young adults, awareness of personal development and growing independence begins at the higher secondary stage. It is during this period that they seek to understand themselves and the society in which they live. Literature plays an important role in moulding young minds. The choice of stories and biographical sketches in *Snapshots* by contemporary writers exposes learners to the various narratives of life that the literatures of the world offer.

The stories deal with a range of human predicaments: moral choices in adolescents, as in William Saroyan's 'The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse'; the poignancy of personal loss and reconciliation that follows war in Marga Minco's 'The Address'; and professional commitment in A.J. Cronin's 'Birth', an excerpt from the novel *The Citadel*. We also have J.B. Priestley's play, 'Mother's Day', an early comment on the acceptance of (and rebellion against) the assumed roles of men and women at home. Vikram Seth's 'The Tale of Melon City' is a humorous satire set in verse.

The language of these stories allows learners to read on their own with only occasional support from the teacher or reference to the dictionary. Learners should be encouraged to read the stories at home and the themes, narrative patterns and stylistic features including use of punctuation can be discussed in the classroom. It is hoped that this gateway to extensive reading will help learners imbibe language unconsciously.

# THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

## PREAMBLE

**WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA,** having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a [1]**[SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC]** and to secure to all its citizens :

**JUSTICE,** social, economic and political;

**LIBERTY** of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

**EQUALITY** of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all

**FRATERNITY** assuring the dignity of the individual and the [2][unity and integrity of the Nation];

**IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY** this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949 do **HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.**

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1. Subs. by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec.2, for "Sovereign Democratic Republic" (w.e.f. 3.1.1977)
2. Subs. by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec.2, for "Unity of the Nation" (w.e.f. 3.1.1977)

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# Constitution of India

**Part IV A (Article 51 A)**

# Fundamental Duties

It shall be the duty of every citizen of India —

(a) to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem;

(b) to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom;

(c) to uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India;

(d) to defend the country and render national service when called upon to do so;

(e) to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;

(f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;

(g) to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures;

(h) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;

(i) to safeguard public property and to abjure violence;

(j) to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement;

*(k) who is a parent or guardian, to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of six and fourteen years.

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**Note:** The Article 51A containing Fundamental Duties was inserted by the Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976 (with effect from 3 January 1977).

*(k) was inserted by the Constitution (86th Amendment) Act, 2002 (with effect from 1 April 2010).

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For permission to reproduce copyright material in this book NCERT would like to thank the following: Harcourt, Brace and Company for 'The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse' by William Saroyan from *Great Short Stories*; Peter Owen Publishers for 'The Address' by Marga Minco from *The Other Side*; A.J.Cronin for 'Birth' extracted from *The Citadel*; Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd for 'The Tale of Melon City' by Vikram Seth from *The Collected Poems*.

The Council is grateful to the members of the Review Committee for Rationalisation of Curriculum constituted by Department of Curriculum Studies NCERT, from CBSE and Department of Education in Languages NCERT New Delhi for reviewing the textbooks and Supplementary Readers.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi, acknowledges the services of Sunanda Khanna, *Copy Editor*; Surender K. Vats, *Proof Reader*; Mohammad Harun and Uttam Kumar, *DTP Operators*; and Parash Ram Kaushik, *Incharge,* Computer Station. The efforts of the Publication Department, NCERT are also highly appreciated.

# CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

**Part III (Articles 12 – 35)**
(Subject to certain conditions, some exceptions
and reasonable restrictions)

guarantees these

# Fundamental Rights

**Right to Equality**

- before law and equal protection of laws;
- irrespective of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth;
- of opportunity in public employment;
- by abolition of untouchability and titles.

**Right to Freedom**

- of expression, assembly, association, movement, residence and profession;
- of certain protections in respect of conviction for offences;
- of protection of life and personal liberty;
- of free and compulsory education for children between the age of six and fourteen years;
- of protection against arrest and detention in certain cases.

**Right against Exploitation**

- for prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour;
- for prohibition of employment of children in hazardous jobs.

**Right to Freedom of Religion**

- freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion;
- freedom to manage religious affairs;
- freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion;
- freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in educational institutions wholly maintained by the State.

**Cultural and Educational Rights**

- for protection of interests of minorities to conserve their language, script and culture;
- for minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

**Right to Constitutional Remedies**

- by issuance of directions or orders or writs by the Supreme Court and High Courts for enforcement of these Fundamental Rights.

# Contents



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# 1
# The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse

William Saroyan

*This story is about two poor Armenian boys who belong to a tribe whose hallmarks are trust and honesty.*



One day back there in the good old days when I was nine and the world was full of every imaginable kind of magnificence, and life was still a delightful and mysterious dream, my cousin Mourad, who was considered crazy by everybody who knew him except me, came to my house at four in the morning and woke me up tapping on the window of my room.

Aram, he said.

I jumped out of bed and looked out of the window.

I couldn't believe what I saw.

It wasn't morning yet, but it was summer and with daybreak not many minutes around the corner of the world it was light enough for me to know I wasn't dreaming.

My cousin Mourad was sitting on a beautiful white horse.

I stuck my head out of the window and rubbed my eyes.

Yes, he said in Armenian. It's a horse. You're not dreaming. Make it quick if you want to ride.

I knew my cousin Mourad enjoyed being alive more than anybody else who had ever fallen into the world by mistake, but this was more than even I could believe.

In the first place, my earliest memories had been memories of horses and my first longings had been longings to ride.

This was the wonderful part.

In the second place, we were poor.

This was the part that wouldn't permit me to believe what I saw.

We were poor. We had no money. Our whole tribe was poverty-stricken. Every branch of the Garoghlanian[1] family was living in the most amazing and comical poverty in the world. Nobody could understand where we ever got money enough to keep us with food in our bellies, not even the old men of the family. Most important of all, though, we were famous for our honesty. We had been famous for our honesty for something like eleven centuries, even when we had been the wealthiest family in what we liked to think was the world. We were proud first, honest next, and after that we believed in right and wrong. None of us would take advantage of anybody in the world, let alone steal.

Consequently, even though I could *see* the horse, so magnificent; even though I could *smell* it, so lovely; even though I could *hear* it breathing, so exciting; I couldn't *believe* the horse had anything to do with my cousin Mourad or with me or with any of the other members of our family, asleep or awake, because I *knew* my cousin Mourad couldn't have *bought* the horse, and if he couldn't have bought it he must have *stolen* it, and I refused to believe he had stolen it.

No member of the Garoghlanian family could be a thief.

I stared first at my cousin and then at the horse. There was a pious stillness and humour in each of them which on the one hand delighted me and on the other frightened me.

Mourad, I said, where did you steal this horse?

Leap out of the window, he said, if you want to ride.

It was true, then. He *had* stolen the horse. There was no question about it. He had come to invite me to ride or not, as I chose.

Well, it seemed to me stealing a horse for a ride was not the same thing as stealing something else, such as money. For all I knew, maybe it wasn't stealing at all. If you were crazy about horses the way my cousin Mourad and

[1] an Armenian tribe

I were, it wasn't stealing. It wouldn't become stealing until we offered to sell the horse, which of course, I knew we would never do.

Let me put on some clothes, I said.

All right, he said, but hurry.

I leaped into my clothes.

I jumped down to the yard from the window and leaped up onto the horse behind my cousin Mourad.

That year we lived at the edge of town, on Walnut Avenue. Behind our house was the country: vineyards, orchards, irrigation ditches, and country roads. In less than three minutes we were on Olive Avenue, and then the horse began to trot. The air was new and lovely to breathe. The feel of the horse running was wonderful. My cousin Mourad who was considered one of the craziest members of our family began to sing. I mean, he began to roar.

Every family has a crazy streak in it somewhere, and my cousin Mourad was considered the natural descendant of the crazy streak in our tribe. Before him was our uncle Khosrove, an enormous man with a powerful head of black hair and the largest moustache in the San Joaquin Valley[2], a man so furious in temper, so irritable, so impatient that he stopped anyone from talking by roaring, *It is no harm; pay no attention to it.*

That was all, no matter what anybody happened to be talking about. Once it was his own son Arak running eight blocks to the barber's shop where his father was having his moustache trimmed to tell him their house was on fire. This man Khosrove sat up in the chair and roared, It is no harm; pay no attention to it. The barber said, But the boy says your house is on fire. So Khosrove roared, Enough, it is no harm, I say.

My cousin Mourad was considered the natural descendant of this man, although Mourad's father was Zorab, who was practical and nothing else. That's how it was in our tribe. A man could be the father of his son's flesh, but that did not mean that he was also the father of his spirit. The distribution of the various kinds of spirit of our tribe had been from the beginning capricious and vagrant.

We rode and my cousin Mourad sang. For all anybody knew we were still in the old country where, at least according to some of our neighbours, we belonged. We let the horse run as long as it felt like running.

At last my cousin Mourad said, Get down. I want to ride alone.

Will you let me ride alone? I asked.

[2] one of the long interior valleys of California

That is up to the horse, my cousin said. Get down.

The *horse* will let me ride, I said.

We shall see, he said. Don't forget that I have a way with a horse.

Well, I said, any way you have with a horse, I have also.

For the sake of your safety, he said, let us hope so. Get down.

All right, I said, but remember you've got to let me try to ride alone.

I got down and my cousin Mourad kicked his heels into the horse and shouted, *Vazire*, run. The horse stood on its hind legs, snorted, and burst into a fury of speed that was the loveliest thing I had ever seen. My cousin Mourad raced the horse across a field of dry grass to an irrigation ditch, crossed the ditch on the horse, and five minutes later returned, dripping wet.

The sun was coming up.

Now it's my turn to ride, I said.

My cousin Mourad got off the horse.

Ride, he said.

I leaped to the back of the horse and for a moment knew the most awful fear imaginable. The horse did not move.

Kick into his muscles, my cousin Mourad said. What are you waiting for? We've got to take him back before everybody in the world is up and about.

I kicked into the muscles of the horse. Once again it reared and snorted. Then it began to run. I didn't know what to do. Instead of running across the field to the irrigation ditch the horse ran down the road to the vineyard of Dikran Halabian where it began to leap over vines. The horse leaped over seven vines before I fell. Then it continued running.

My cousin Mourad came running down the road.

I'm not worried about you, he shouted. We've got to get that horse. You go this way and I'll go this way. If you come upon him, be kindly. I'll be near.

I continued down the road and my cousin, Mourad went across the field toward the irrigation ditch.

It took him half an hour to find the horse and bring him back.

All right, he said, jump on. The whole world is awake now.

What will we do? I said.

Well, he said, we'll either take him back or hide him until tomorrow morning.

He didn't sound worried and I knew he'd hide him and not take him back. Not for a while, at any rate.

Where will we hide him? I said.

I know a place, he said.

How long ago did you steal this horse? I said.

It suddenly dawned on me that he had been taking these early morning rides for some time and had come for me this morning only because he knew how much I longed to ride.

Who said anything about stealing a horse? he said.

Anyhow, I said, how long ago did you begin riding every morning?

Not until this morning, he said.

Are you telling the truth? I said.

Of course not, he said, but if we are found out, that's what you're to say. I don't want both of us to be liars. All you know is that we started riding this morning.

All right, I said.

He walked the horse quietly to the barn of a deserted vineyard which at one time had been the pride of a farmer named Fetvajian. There were some oats and dry alfalfa in the barn.

We began walking home.

It wasn't easy, he said, to get the horse to behave so nicely. At first it wanted to run wild, but, as I've told you, I have a way with a horse. I can get it to want to do anything I want it to do. Horses understand me.

How do you do it? I said.

I have an understanding with a horse, he said.

Yes, but what sort of an understanding? I said.

A simple and honest one, he said.

Well, I said, I wish I knew how to reach an understanding like that with a horse.

You're still a small boy, he said. When you get to be thirteen you'll know how to do it.

I went home and ate a hearty breakfast.

That afternoon my uncle Khosrove came to our house for coffee and cigarettes. He sat in the parlour, sipping and smoking and remembering the old country. Then another visitor arrived, a farmer named John Byro, an Assyrian who, out of loneliness, had learned to speak Armenian. My mother brought the lonely visitor coffee and tobacco and he rolled a cigarette and sipped and smoked, and then at last, sighing sadly, he said, My white horse which was stolen last month is still gone — I cannot understand it.

My uncle Khosrove became very irritated and shouted, It's no harm. What is the loss of a horse? Haven't we all lost the homeland? What is this crying over a horse?

That may be all right for you, a city dweller, to say, John Byro said, but what of my surrey? What good is a surrey without a horse?

Pay no attention to it, my uncle Khosrove roared.

I walked ten miles to get here, John Byro said.

You have legs, my uncle Khosrove shouted.

My left leg pains me, the farmer said.

Pay no attention to it, my uncle Khosrove roared.

That horse cost me sixty dollars, the farmer said.

I spit on money, my uncle Khosrove said.

He got up and stalked out of the house, slamming the screen door.

My mother explained.

He has a gentle heart, she said. It is simply that he is homesick and such a large man.

The farmer went away and I ran over to my cousin Mourad's house.

He was sitting under a peach tree, trying to repair the hurt wing of a young robin which could not fly. He was talking to the bird.

What is it? he said.

The farmer, John Byro, I said. He visited our house. He wants his horse. You've had it a month. I want you to promise not to take it back until I learn to ride.

It will take you *a year* to learn to ride, my cousin Mourad said.

We could keep the horse a year, I said.

My cousin Mourad leaped to his feet.

What? he roared. Are you inviting a member of the Garoghlanian family to steal? The horse must go back to its true owner.

When? I said.

In six months at the latest, he said.

He threw the bird into the air. The bird tried hard, almost fell twice, but at last flew away, high and straight.

Early every morning for two weeks my cousin Mourad and I took the horse out of the barn of the deserted vineyard where we were hiding it and rode it, and every morning the horse, when it was my turn to ride alone, leaped over grape vines and small trees and threw me and ran away. Nevertheless, I hoped in time to learn to ride the way my cousin Mourad rode.

One morning on the way to Fetvajian's deserted vineyard we ran into the farmer John Byro who was on his way to town.

Let me do the talking, my cousin Mourad said. I have a way with farmers.

Good morning, John Byro, my cousin Mourad said to the farmer.

The farmer studied the horse eagerly.

Good morning, son of my friends, he said. What is the name of your horse?

*My Heart*, my cousin Mourad said in Armenian.

A lovely name, John Byro said, for a lovely horse. I could swear it is the horse that was stolen from me many weeks ago. May I look into his mouth?

Of course, Mourad said.

The farmer looked into the mouth of the horse.

Tooth for tooth, he said. I would swear it *is* my horse if I didn't know your parents. The fame of your family for honesty is well known to me. Yet the horse is the twin of my horse. A suspicious man would believe his eyes instead of his heart. Good day, my young friends.

Good day, John Byro, my cousin Mourad said.

Early the following morning we took the horse to John Byro's vineyard and put it in the barn. The dogs followed us around without making a sound.

The dogs, I whispered to my cousin Mourad. I thought they would bark.

They would at somebody else, he said. I have a way with dogs.

My cousin Mourad put his arms around the horse, pressed his nose into the horse's nose, patted it, and then we went away.

That afternoon John Byro came to our house in his surrey and showed my mother the horse that had been stolen and returned.

I do not know what to think, he said. The horse is stronger than ever. Better-tempered, too. I thank God. My uncle Khosrove, who was in the parlour, became irritated and shouted, Quiet, man, quiet. Your horse has been returned. Pay no attention to it.

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## Reading with Insight

1. You will probably agree that this story does not have breathless adventure and exciting action. Then what in your opinion makes it interesting?
2. Did the boys return the horse because they were conscience-stricken or because they were afraid?
3. "One day back there in the good old days when I was nine and the world was full of every imaginable kind of magnificence, and life was still a delightful and mysterious dream..." The story begins in a mood of nostalgia. Can you narrate some incident from your childhood that might make an interesting story?
4. The story revolves around characters who belong to a tribe in Armenia. Mourad and Aram are members of the Garoghlanian family. Now locate Armenia and Assyria on the atlas and prepare a write-up on the Garoghlanian tribes. You may write about people, their names, traits, geographical and economic features as suggested in the story.

### Try This Out

"The horse stood on its hind legs, snorted, and burst into a fury of speed that was the loveliest thing I had ever seen." These lines could be an artist's delight. Try to draw a picture as depicted in the above lines.

11073CH02

# 2
# The Address

Marga Minco

*This short story is a poignant account of a daughter who goes in search of her mother's belongings after the War, in Holland. When she finds them, the objects evoke memories of her earlier life. However, she decides to leave them all behind and resolves to move on.*



'Do you still know me?' I asked.

The woman looked at me searchingly. She had opened the door a chink. I came closer and stood on the step.

'No, I don't know you.'

'I'm Mrs S's daughter.'

She held her hand on the door as though she wanted to prevent it opening any further. Her face gave absolutely no sign of recognition. She kept staring at me in silence.

Perhaps I was mistaken, I thought, perhaps it isn't her. I had seen her only once, fleetingly, and that was years ago. It was most probable that I had rung the wrong bell. The woman let go of the door and stepped to the side. She was wearing my mother's green knitted cardigan. The wooden buttons were rather pale from washing. She saw that I was looking at the cardigan and half hid herself again behind the door. But I knew now that I was right.

'Well, you knew my mother?' I asked.

'Have you come back?' said the woman. 'I thought that no one had come back.'

'Only me.'

A door opened and closed in the passage behind her. A musty smell emerged.

'I regret I cannot do anything for you.'

'I've come here specially on the train. I wanted to talk to you for a moment.'

'It is not convenient for me now,' said the woman. 'I can't see you. Another time.'

She nodded and cautiously closed the door as though no one inside the house should be disturbed.

I stood where I was on the step. The curtain in front of the bay window moved. Someone stared at me and would then have asked what I wanted. 'Oh, nothing,' the woman would have said. 'It was nothing.'

I looked at the name-plate again. *Dorling* it said, in black letters on white enamel. And on the jamb, a bit higher, the number. *Number 46*.

As I walked slowly back to the station I thought about my mother, who had given me the address years ago. It had been in the first half of the War. I was home for a few days and it struck me immediately that something or other about the rooms had changed. I missed various things. My mother was surprised I should have noticed so quickly. Then she told me about Mrs Dorling. I had never heard of her but apparently she was an old acquaintance of my mother, whom she hadn't seen for years. She had suddenly turned up and renewed their contact. Since then she had come regularly.

'Every time she leaves here she takes something home with her,' said my mother. 'She took all the table silver in one go. And then the antique plates that hung there. She had trouble lugging those large vases, and I'm worried she got a crick in her back from the crockery.' My mother shook her head pityingly. 'I would never have dared ask her. She suggested it to me herself. She even insisted. She wanted to save all my nice things. If we have to leave here we shall lose everything, she says.'

'Have you agreed with her that she should keep everything?' I asked.

'As if that's necessary,' my mother cried. 'It would simply be an insult to talk like that. And think about the risk she's running, each time she goes out of our door with a full suitcase or bag.'

My mother seemed to notice that I was not entirely convinced. She looked at me reprovingly and after that we spoke no more about it.

Meanwhile I had arrived at the station without having paid much attention to things on the way. I was walking in familiar places again for the first time since the War, but I did not want to go further than was necessary. I didn't

want to upset myself with the sight of streets and houses full of memories from a precious time.

In the train back I saw Mrs Dorling in front of me again as I had the first time I met her. It was the morning after the day my mother had told me about her. I had got up late and, coming downstairs, I saw my mother about to see someone out. A woman with a broad back.

'There is my daughter,' said my mother. She beckoned to me.

The woman nodded and picked up the suitcase under the coat-rack. She wore a brown coat and a shapeless hat.

'Does she live far away?' I asked, seeing the difficulty she had going out of the house with the heavy case.

'In Marconi Street,' said my mother. 'Number 46. Remember that.'

I had remembered it. But I had waited a long time to go there. Initially after the Liberation I was absolutely not interested in all that stored stuff, and naturally I was also rather afraid of it. Afraid of being confronted with things that had belonged to a connection that no longer existed; which were hidden away in cupboards and boxes and waiting in vain until they were put back in their place again; which had endured all those years because they were 'things.'

But gradually everything became more normal again. Bread was getting to be a lighter colour, there was a bed you could sleep in unthreatened, a room with a view you were more used to glancing at each day. And one day I noticed I was curious about all the possessions that must still be at that address. I wanted to see them, touch, remember.

After my first visit in vain to Mrs Dorling's house I decided to try a second time. Now a girl of about fifteen opened the door to me. I asked her if her mother was at home.

'No' she said, 'my mother's doing an errand.'

'No matter,' I said, 'I'll wait for her.'

I followed the girl along the passage. An old-fashioned iron Hanukkah[1] candle-holder hung next to a mirror. We never used it because it was much more cumbersome than a single candlestick.

'Won't you sit down?' asked the girl. She held open the door of the living-room and I went inside past her. I stopped, horrified. I was in a room I knew and did not know. I found myself in the midst of things I did want to see again but which oppressed me in the strange atmosphere. Or because of the tasteless way everything was arranged, because of the ugly furniture or the muggy smell that hung there, I don't know; but I scarcely dared to look

[1] the Feast of Lights, a Hebrew festival in December

around me. The girl moved a chair. I sat down and stared at the woollen table-cloth. I rubbed it. My fingers grew warm from rubbing. I followed the lines of the pattern. Somewhere on the edge there should be a burn mark that had never been repaired.

'My mother'll be back soon,' said the girl. 'I've already made tea for her. Will you have a cup?'

'Thank you.'

I looked up. The girl put cups ready on the tea-table. She had a broad back. Just like her mother. She poured tea from a white pot. All it had was a gold border on the lid, I remembered. She opened a box and took some spoons out.

'That's a nice box.' I heard my own voice. It was a strange voice. As though each sound was different in this room.

'Oh, you know about them?' She had turned round and brought me my tea. She laughed. 'My mother says it is antique. We've got lots more.' She pointed round the room. 'See for yourself.'

I had no need to follow her hand. I knew which things she meant. I just looked at the still life over the tea-table. As a child I had always fancied the apple on the pewter plate.

'We use it for everything,' she said. 'Once we even ate off the plates hanging there on the wall. I wanted to so much. But it wasn't anything special.'

I had found the burn mark on the table-cloth. The girl looked questioningly at me.

'Yes,' I said, 'you get so used to touching all these lovely things in the house, you hardly look at them any more. You only notice when something is missing, because it has to be repaired or because you have lent it, for example.'

Again I heard the unnatural sound of my voice and I went on: 'I remember my mother once asked me if I would help her polish the silver. It was a very long time ago and I was probably bored that day or perhaps I had to stay at home because I was ill, as she had never asked me before. I asked her which silver she meant and she replied, surprised, that it was the spoons, forks and knives, of course. And that was the strange thing, I didn't know the cutlery we ate off every day was silver.'

The girl laughed again.

'I bet you don't know it is either.' I looked intently at her.

'What we eat with?' she asked.

'Well, do you know?'

She hesitated. She walked to the sideboard and wanted to open a drawer. 'I'll look. It's in here.'

I jumped up. 'I was forgetting the time. I must catch my train.'

She had her hand on the drawer. 'Don't you want to wait for my mother?'

'No, I must go.' I walked to the door. The girl pulled the drawer open. 'I can find my own way.'

As I walked down the passage I heard the jingling of spoons and forks. At the corner of the road I looked up at the name-plate. *Marconi Street*, it said. I had been at Number 46. The address was correct. But now I didn't want to remember it any more. I wouldn't go back there because the objects that are linked in your memory with the familiar life of former times instantly lose their value when, severed from them, you see them again in strange surroundings. And what should I have done with them in a small rented room where the shreds of black-out paper still hung along the windows and no more than a handful of cutlery fitted in the narrow table drawer?

I resolved to forget the address. Of all the things I had to forget, that would be the easiest.

## Reading with Insight

1. 'Have you come back?' said the woman. 'I thought that no one had come back.' Does this statement give some clue about the story? If yes, what is it?
2. The story is divided into pre-War and post-War times. What hardships do you think the girl underwent during these times?
3. Why did the narrator of the story want to forget the address?
4. 'The Address' is a story of human predicament that follows war. Comment.

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# 3
# Mother's Day

J.B. Priestley

*The following play is a humorous portrayal of the status of the mother in a family. Let's read on to see how Mrs Pearson's family reacts when she tries to stand up for her own rights.*



***Characters***

Mrs Annie Pearson
George Pearson
Doris Pearson
Cyril Pearson
Mrs Fitzgerald

*The action takes place in the living-room of the Pearsons' house in a London suburb.*

***Time**: The Present*

***Scene**: The living-room of the Pearson family. Afternoon. It is a comfortably furnished, much lived-in room in a small suburban semi-detached villa. If necessary only one door need be used, but it is better with two—one up left leading to the front door and the stairs and the other in the right wall leading to the kitchen and the back door. There can be a muslin-covered window in the left wall and possibly one in the right wall, too. The fireplace is assumed to be in the fourth wall. There is a settee up right, an armchair down left and one down right. A small table with two chairs on either side of it stands at the centre.*

*When the curtain rises it is an afternoon in early autumn and the stage can be well lit. Mrs Pearson at right, and Mrs Fitzgerald at left, are sitting opposite each other at the small table, on which are two tea-cups and saucers and the cards with which Mrs Fitzgerald has been telling Mrs Pearson's fortune. Mrs Pearson is a pleasant but worried-looking woman in her forties. Mrs Fitzgerald is older, heavier and a strong and sinister personality. She is smoking. It is very important that these two should have sharply contrasting voices—Mrs Pearson speaking in a light, flurried sort of tone, with a touch of suburban Cockney perhaps; and Mrs Fitzgerald with a deep voice, rather Irish perhaps.*

MRS FITZGERALD: [*collecting up the cards*] And that's all I can tell you, Mrs Pearson. Could be a good fortune. Could be a bad one. All depends on yourself now. Make up your mind—and there it is.

MRS PEARSON: Yes, thank you, Mrs Fitzgerald. I'm much obliged, I'm sure. It's wonderful having a real fortune-teller living next door. Did you learn that out East, too?

MRS FITZGERALD: I did. Twelve years I had of it, with my old man rising to be Lieutenant Quartermaster. He learnt a lot, and I learnt a lot more. But will you make up your mind now, Mrs Pearson dear? Put your foot down, once an' for all, an' be the mistress of your own house an' the boss of your own family.

MRS PEARSON: [*smiling apologetically*] That's easier said than done. Besides I'm so fond of them even if they are so thoughtless and selfish. They don't mean to be...

MRS FITZGERALD: [*cutting in*] Maybe not. But it'ud be better for them if they learnt to treat you properly...

MRS PEARSON: Yes, I suppose it would, in a way.

MRS FITZGERALD: No doubt about it at all. Who's the better for being spoilt — grown man, lad or girl? Nobody. You think it does 'em good when you run after them all the time, take their orders as if you were the servant in the house, stay at home every night while they go out enjoying themselves? Never in all your life. It's the ruin of them as well as you. Husbands, sons, daughters should be taking notice of wives an' mothers, not giving 'em orders an' treating 'em like dirt. An' don't tell me you don't know what I mean, for I know more than you've told me.

MRS PEARSON: [*dubiously*] I—keep dropping a hint...

MRS FITZGERALD: Hint? It's more than hints your family needs, Mrs Pearson.

MRS PEARSON: [*dubiously*] I suppose it is. But I do hate any unpleasantness. And it's so hard to know where to start. I keep making up my mind to have it out with them but somehow I don't know how to begin. [*She glances at her watch or at a clock*] Oh — good gracious! Look at the time. Nothing ready and they'll be home any minute and probably all in a hurry to go out again.
[*As she is about to rise, Mrs Fitzgerald reaches out across the table and pulls her down.*]

MRS FITZGERALD: Let 'em wait or look after themselves for once. This is where your foot goes down. Start now. [*She lights a cigarette from the one she has just finished.*]

MRS PEARSON: [*embarrassed*] Mrs Fitzgerald — I know you mean well — in fact, I agree with you — but I just can't — and it's no use

you trying to make me. If I promise you I'd really have it out with them, I know I wouldn't be able to keep my promise.

MRS FITZGERALD: Then let me do it.

MRS PEARSON: [*flustered*] Oh no — thank you very much, Mrs Fitzgerald— but that wouldn't do at all. It couldn't possibly be somebody else—they'd resent it at once and wouldn't listen—and really I couldn't blame them. I know I ought to do it—but you see how it is? [*She looks apologetically across the table, smiling rather miserably.*]

MRS FITZGERALD: [*coolly*] You haven't got the idea.

MRS PEARSON: [*bewildered*] Oh—I'm sorry—I thought you asked me to let you do it.

MRS FITZGERALD: I did. But not as me—as *you.*

MRS PEARSON: But—I don't understand. You couldn't be me.

MRS FITZGERALD: [*coolly*] We change places. Or—really—bodies. You look like me. I look like you.

MRS PEARSON: But that's impossible.

MRS FITZGERALD: How do you *know*? Ever tried it?

MRS PEARSON: No, of course not...

MRS FITZGERALD: [*coolly*] I have. Not for some time but it still ought to work. Won't last long, but long enough for what we want to do. Learnt it out East, of course, where they're up to all these tricks. [*She holds her hand out across the table, keeping the cigarette in her mouth*] Gimme your hands, dear.

MRS PEARSON: [*dubiously*] Well—I don't know—is it right?

MRS FITZGERALD: It's your only chance. Give me your hands an' keep quiet a minute. Just don't think about anything. [*Taking her hands*] Now look at me. [*They stare at each other. Muttering*] *Arshtatta dum—arshtatta lam—arshtatta lamdumbona...*

[*This little scene should be acted very carefully. We are to assume that the personalities change bodies. After the spell has been spoken, both women, still grasping hands, go lax, as if the life were out of them. Then both come to life, but with the personality of the other. Each must try to adopt the voice and mannerisms of the other. So now Mrs Pearson is bold and dominating and Mrs Fitzgerald is nervous and fluttering.*]

MRS PEARSON: [*now with Mrs Fitzgerald's personality*] See what I mean, dear? [*She notices the cigarette*] Here — you don't want

that. [*She snatches it and puts it in her own mouth, puffing contentedly.*]

[*Mrs Fitzgerald, now with Mrs Pearson's personality, looks down at herself and sees that her body has changed and gives a scream of fright.*]

MRS FITZGERALD: [*with Mrs Pearson's personality*] Oh—it's happened.

MRS PEARSON: [*complacently*] Of course it's happened. Very neat. Didn't know I had it in me.

MRS FITZGERALD: [*alarmed*] But whatever shall I do, Mrs Fitzgerald? George and the children can't see me like this.

MRS PEARSON: [*grimly*] They aren't going to—that's the point. They'll have me to deal with—only they won't know it.

MRS FITZGERALD: [*still alarmed*] But what if we can't change back? It'ud be *terrible.*

MRS PEARSON: Here—steady, Mrs Pearson—if you had to live my life it wouldn't be so bad. You'd have more fun as me than you've had as you.

MRS FITZGERALD: Yes—but I don't want to be anybody else...

MRS PEARSON: Now—stop worrying. It's easier changing back—I can do it any time we want...

MRS FITZGERALD: Well—do it now...

MRS PEARSON: Not likely. I've got to deal with your family first. That's the idea, isn't it? Didn't know how to begin with 'em, you said. Well. I'll show you.

MRS FITZGERALD: But what am I going to do?

MRS PEARSON: Go into my house for a bit—there's nobody there—then pop back and see how we're doing. You ought to enjoy it. Better get off now before one of 'em comes.

MRS FITZGERALD: [*nervously rising*] Yes—I suppose that's best. You're sure it'll be all right?

MRS PEARSON: [*chuckling*] It'll be *wonderful.* Now off you go, dear.

*[Mrs Fitzgerald crosses and hurries out through the door right. Left to herself, Mrs Pearson smokes away—lighting another cigarette—and begins laying out the cards for patience on the table.*

*After a few moments Doris Pearson comes bursting in left. She is a pretty girl in her early twenties, who would be pleasant enough if she had not been spoilt.*]

DORIS: [*before she has taken anything in*] Mum—you'll have to iron my yellow silk. I must wear it tonight. [*She now*

*sees what is happening, and is astounded.*] What are you doing? [*She moves down left centre.*]

[*Mrs Pearson now uses her ordinary voice, but her manner is not fluttering and apologetic but cool and incisive.*]

MRS PEARSON: [*not even looking up*] What d'you think I'm doing—whitewashing the ceiling?

DORIS: [*still astounded*] But you're *smoking*!

MRS PEARSON: That's right, dear. No law against it, is there?

DORIS: But I thought you didn't smoke.

MRS PEARSON: Then you thought wrong.

DORIS: Are we having tea in the kitchen?

MRS PEARSON: Have it where you like, dear.

DORIS: [*angrily*] Do you mean it isn't ready?

MRS PEARSON: Yours isn't. I've had all I want. Might go out later and get a square meal at the Clarendon.

DORIS: [*hardly believing her ears*] Who might?

MRS PEARSON: I might. Who d'you think?

DORIS: [*staring at her*] Mum—what's the matter with you?

MRS PEARSON: Don't be silly.

DORIS: [*indignantly*] It's not me that's being silly—and I must say it's a bit much when I've been working hard all day and you can't even bother to get my tea ready. Did you hear what I said about my yellow silk?

MRS PEARSON: No. Don't you like it now? I never did.

DORIS: [*indignantly*] Of course I like it. And I'm going to wear it tonight. So I want it ironed.

MRS PEARSON: Want it ironed? What d'you think it's going to do—iron itself?

DORIS: No, you're going to iron it for me... You always do.

MRS PEARSON: Well, this time I don't. And don't talk rubbish to me about working hard. I've a good idea how much you do, Doris Pearson. I put in twice the hours you do, and get no wages nor thanks for it. Why are you going to wear your yellow silk? Where are you going?

DORIS: [*sulkily*] Out with Charlie Spence.

MRS PEARSON: Why?

DORIS: [*wildly*] Why? Why? What's the matter with you? Why shouldn't I go out with Charlie Spence if he asks me and I want to? Any objections? Go on—you might as well tell me...

MRS PEARSON: [*severely*] Can't you find anybody better? I wouldn't be seen dead with Charlie Spence. Buck teeth and half-witted...

DORIS: He isn't...

MRS PEARSON: When I was your age I'd have found somebody better than Charlie Spence—or given myself up as a bad job.

DORIS: [*nearly in tears*] Oh—shut up!

[*Doris runs out left. Mrs Pearson chuckles and begins putting the cards together.*

*After a moment Cyril Pearson enters left. He is the masculine counterpart of Doris.]*

CYRIL: [*briskly*] Hello—Mum. Tea ready?

MRS PEARSON: No.

CYRIL: [*moving to the table; annoyed*] Why not?

MRS PEARSON: [*coolly*] I couldn't bother.

CYRIL: Feeling off-colour or something?

MRS PEARSON: Never felt better in my life.

CYRIL: [*aggressively*] What's the idea then?

MRS PEARSON: Just a change.

CYRIL: [*briskly*] Well, snap out of it, Ma—and get cracking. Haven't too much time.

[*Cyril is about to go when Mrs Pearson's voice checks him.*]

MRS PEARSON: *I've* plenty of time.

CYRIL: Yes, but I haven't. Got a busy night tonight. [*moving left to the door*] Did you put my things out?

MRS PEARSON: [*coolly*] Can't remember. But I doubt it.

CYRIL: [*moving to the table; protesting*] Now—look. When I asked you this morning, you promised. You said you'd have to look through 'em first in case there was any mending.

MRS PEARSON: Yes—well now I've decided I don't like mending.

CYRIL: That's a nice way to talk—what would happen if we all talked like that?

MRS PEARSON: You all do talk like that. If there's something at home you don't want to do, you don't do it. If it's something at your work, you get the Union to bar it. Now all that's happened is that *I've* joined the movement.

CYRIL: [*staggered*] I don't get this, Mum. What's going on?

MRS PEARSON: [*laconic and sinister*] Changes.

[*Doris enters left. She is in the process of dressing and is now wearing a wrap. She looks pale and red-eyed.*]

MRS PEARSON: You look terrible. I wouldn't wear that face even for Charlie Spence.

DORIS: [*moving above the table; angrily*] Oh—shut up about Charlie Spence. And anyhow I'm not ready yet—just dressing. And if I do look terrible, it's your fault—you made me cry.

CYRIL: [*curious*] Why—what did she do?

DORIS: Never you mind.

MRS PEARSON: [*rising and preparing to move to the kitchen*] Have we any stout left? I can't remember.

CYRIL: Bottle or two, I think. But you don't want stout now.

MRS PEARSON: [*moving left slowly*] I do.

CYRIL: What for?

MRS PEARSON: [*turning at the door*] To drink—you clot!

[*Mrs Pearson exits right. Instantly Cyril and Doris are in a huddle, close together at left centre, rapidly whispering.*]

DORIS: Has she been like that with you, too?

CYRIL: Yes—no tea ready—couldn't care less...

DORIS: Well, I'm glad it's both of us. I thought I'd done something wrong.

CYRIL: So did I. But it's her of course...

DORIS: She was smoking and playing cards when I came in. I couldn't believe my eyes.

CYRIL: I asked her if she was feeling off-colour and she said she wasn't.

DORIS: Well, she's suddenly all different. An' that's what made me cry. It wasn't what she said but the way she said it—an' the way she *looked*.

CYRIL: Haven't noticed that. She looks just the same to me.

DORIS: She doesn't to me. Do you think she could have hit her head or something—y'know—an' got—what is it?—y'know...

CYRIL: [*staggered*] Do you mean she's barmy?

DORIS: No, you fathead. Y'know—concussion. She might have.

CYRIL: Sounds far-fetched.

DORIS: Well, she's far-fetched, if you ask me. [*She suddenly begins to giggle.*]

CYRIL: Now then—what is it?

DORIS: If she's going to be like this when Dad comes home... [*She giggles again.*]

CYRIL: [*beginning to guffaw*] I'm staying in for that—two front dress circles for the first house...

[*Mrs Pearson enters right, carrying a bottle of stout and a half-filled glass. Cyril and Doris try to stop their guffawing and giggling, but they are not quick enough. Mrs Pearson regards them with contempt.*]

MRS PEARSON [*coldly*] You two are always talking about being grown-up—why don't you both try for once to be your age? [*She moves to the settee and sits.*]

CYRIL: Can't we laugh now?

MRS PEARSON Yes, if it's funny. Go on, tell me. Make me laugh. I could do with it.

DORIS: Y'know you never understand our jokes, Mum...

MRS PEARSON: I was yawning at your jokes before you were born, Doris.

DORIS: [*almost tearful again*] What's making you talk like this? What have we done?

MRS PEARSON: [*promptly*] Nothing but come in, ask for something, go out again, then come back when there's nowhere else to go.

CYRIL: [*aggressively*] Look—if you won't get tea ready, then I'll find something to eat myself...

MRS PEARSON: Why not? Help yourself. [*She takes a sip of stout.*]

CYRIL: [*turning on his way to the kitchen*] Mind you, I think it's a bit thick. I've been working all day.

DORIS: Same here.

MRS PEARSON: (*calmly*) Eight hour day!

CYRIL: Yes—eight hour day—an' don't forget it.

MRS PEARSON: I've done my eight hours.

CYRIL: That's different.

DORIS: Of course it is.

MRS PEARSON: [*calmly*] It *was*. Now it isn't. Forty-hour week for all now. Just watch it at the weekend when I have my two days off.

[*Doris and Cyril exchange alarmed glances. Then they stare at Mrs Pearson who returns their look calmly.*]

CYRIL: Must grab something to eat. Looks as if I'll need to keep my strength up. [*Cyril exits to the kitchen.*]

DORIS: [*moving to the settee; anxiously*] Mummy, you don't mean you're not going to do *anything* on Saturday and Sunday?

MRS PEARSON: [*airily*] No, I wouldn't go that far. I might make a bed or two and do a bit of cooking *as a favour*. Which means, of course, I'll have to be asked very nicely and thanked for everything and generally made a fuss of. But any of you forty-hour-a-weekers who expect to be waited on hand and foot on Saturday and Sunday, with no thanks for it, are in for a nasty disappointment. Might go off for the week-end perhaps.

DORIS: [*aghast*] Go off for the week-end?

MRS PEARSON: Why not? I could do with a change. Stuck here day after day, week after week. If I don't need a change, who does?

DORIS: But where would you go, who would you go with?

MRS PEARSON: That's my business. You don't ask me where you should go and who you should go with, do you?

DORIS: That's different.

MRS PEARSON: The only difference is that I'm a lot older and better able to look after myself, so it's you who should do the asking.

DORIS: Did you fall or hit yourself with something?

MRS PEARSON: [*coldly*] No. But I'll hit you with something, girl, if you don't stop asking silly questions.

[*Doris stares at her open-mouthed, ready to cry.*]

DORIS: Oh—this is awful... [*She begins to cry, not passionately.*]

MRS PEARSON: [*coldly*] Stop blubbering. You're not a baby. If you're old enough to go out with Charlie Spence, you're old enough to behave properly. Now stop it.

[*George Pearson enters left. He is about fifty, fundamentally decent but solemn, self-important, pompous. Preferably he should be a heavy, slow-moving type. He notices Doris's tears.*]

GEORGE: Hello—what's this? Can't be anything to cry about.

DORIS: [*through sobs*] You'll see.

[*Doris runs out left with a sob or two on the way. George stares after her a moment, then looks at Mrs Pearson.*]

GEORGE: Did she say 'You'll see'...?

MRS PEARSON: Yes.

GEORGE: What did she mean?

MRS PEARSON: Better ask her.

[*George looks slowly again at the door then at Mrs Pearson. Then he notices the stout that Mrs Pearson raises for another sip. His eyes almost bulge.*]

GEORGE: Stout?

MRS PEARSON: Yes.

GEORGE: [*amazed*] What are you drinking stout for?

MRS PEARSON: Because I fancied some.

GEORGE: At this time of day?

MRS PEARSON: Yes—what's wrong with it at this time of day?

GEORGE: [*bewildered*] Nothing, I suppose, Annie—but I've never seen you do it before...

MRS PEARSON: Well, you're seeing me now.

GEORGE: [*with heavy distaste*] Yes, an' I don't like it. It doesn't look right. I'm surprised at you.

MRS PEARSON: Well, that ought to be a nice change for you.

GEORGE: What do you mean?

MRS PEARSON: It must be some time since you were surprised at me, George.

GEORGE: I don't like surprises—I'm all for a steady going on—you ought to know that by this time. By the way, I forgot to tell you this morning I wouldn't want any tea. Special snooker match night at the club tonight—an' a bit of supper going. So no tea.

MRS PEARSON: That's all right. There isn't any.

GEORGE: [*astonished*] You mean you didn't get any ready?

MRS PEARSON: Yes. And a good thing, too, as it's turned out.

GEORGE: [*aggrieved*] That's all very well, but suppose I'd wanted some?

MRS PEARSON: My goodness! Listen to the man! Annoyed because I don't get a tea for him that he doesn't even want. Ever tried that at the club?

GEORGE: Tried what at the club?

MRS PEARSON: Going up to the bar and telling 'em you don't want a glass of beer but you're annoyed because they haven't already poured it out. Try that on them and see what you get.

GEORGE: I don't know what you're talking about.

MRS PEARSON: They'd laugh at you even more than they do now.

GEORGE: [*indignantly*] Laugh at me? They don't laugh at me.

MRS PEARSON: Of course they do. You ought to have found that out by this time. Anybody else would have done. You're one of their standing jokes. Famous. They call you Pompy-ompy Pearson because they think you're so slow and pompous.

GEORGE: [*horrified*] Never!

MRS PEARSON: It's always beaten me why you should want to spend so much time at a place where they're always laughing at you behind your back and calling you names. Leaving your wife at home, night after night. Instead of going out with her, who doesn't make you look a fool…

[*Cyril enters right, with a glass of milk in one hand and a thick slice of cake in the other. George, almost dazed, turns to him appealingly.*]

GEORGE: Here, Cyril, you've been with me to the club once or twice. They don't laugh at me and call me Pompy-ompy Pearson, do they? [*Cyril, embarrassed, hesitates.*] *[Angrily*] Go on — tell me. Do they?

CYRIL: [*embarrassed*] Well—yes, Dad, I'm afraid they do.

[*George slowly looks from one to the other, staggered.*]

GEORGE: [*slowly*] Well — I'll be—damned!

[*George exits left, slowly, almost as if somebody had hit him over the head. Cyril, after watching him go, turns indignantly to Mrs Pearson.*]

CYRIL: Now you shouldn't have told him that, Mum. That's not fair. You've hurt his feelings. Mine, too.

MRS PEARSON: Sometimes it does people good to have their feelings hurt. The truth oughtn't to hurt anybody for long. If your father didn't go to the club so often, perhaps they'd stop laughing at him.

CYRIL: [*gloomily*] I doubt it.

MRS PEARSON: [*severely*] Possibly you do, but what I doubt is whether your opinion's worth having. What do you know? Nothing. You spend too much time and good money at greyhound races and dirt tracks and ice shows…

CYRIL: [*sulkily*] Well, what if I do? I've got to enjoy myself somehow, haven't I?

MRS PEARSON: I wouldn't mind so much if you were really enjoying yourself. But are you? And where's it getting you? [*There is a sharp hurried knocking heard off left.*]

CYRIL: Might be for me. I'll see.

[*Cyril hurries out left. In a moment he re-enters, closing the door behind him.*]

It's that silly old bag from next door—Mrs Fitzgerald. You don't want her here, do you?

MRS PEARSON: [*sharply*] Certainly I do. Ask her in. And don't call her a silly old bag either. She's a very nice woman, with a lot more sense than you'll ever have.

[*Cyril exits left. Mrs Pearson finishes her stout, smacking her lips.*

*Cyril re-enters left, ushering in Mrs Fitzgerald, who hesitates in the doorway.*]

Come in, come in, Mrs Fitzgerald.

MRS FITZGERALD: [*moving to left centre; anxiously*] I—just wondered—if everything's—all right...

CYRIL: [*sulkily*] No, it isn't.

MRS PEARSON: [*sharply*] Of course it is. You be quiet.

CYRIL: [*indignantly and loudly*] Why should I be quiet?

MRS PEARSON: [*shouting*] Because I tell you to—you silly, spoilt, young piecan.

MRS FITZGERALD: [*protesting nervously*] Oh—no— surely...

MRS PEARSON: [*severely*] Now, Mrs Fitzgerald, just let me manage my family in my own way—*please!*

MRS FITZGERALD: Yes—but Cyril...

CYRIL: [*sulky and glowering*] Mr Cyril Pearson to you, please, Mrs Fitzgerald. [*Cyril stalks off into the kitchen.*]

MRS FITZGERALD: [*moving to the settee; whispering*] Oh—dear—what's happening?

MRS PEARSON: [*calmly*] Nothing much. Just putting 'em in their places, that's all. Doing what you ought to have done long since.

MRS FITZGERALD: Is George home? [*She sits beside Mrs Pearson on the settee.*]

MRS PEARSON: Yes. I've been telling him what they think of him at the club.

MRS FITZGERALD: Well, they think a lot of him, don't they?

MRS PEARSON: No, they don't. And now he knows it.

MRS FITZGERALD: [*nervously*] Oh—dear—I wish you hadn't, Mrs Fitzgerald...

MRS PEARSON: Nonsense! Doing 'em all a world of good. And they'll be eating out of your hand soon—you'll see...

MRS FITZGERALD: I don't think I want them eating out of my hand...

MRS PEARSON: [*impatiently*] Well, whatever you want, they'll be doing it—all three of 'em. Mark my words, Mrs Pearson.

[*George enters left glumly. He is unpleasantly surprised when he sees the visitor. He moves to the armchair left, sits down heavily and glumly lights his pipe. Then he looks from Mrs Pearson to Mrs Fitzgerald, who is regarding him anxiously.*]

GEORGE: Just looked in for a minute, I suppose, Mrs Fitzgerald?

MRS FITZGERALD: [*who doesn't know what she is saying*] Well—yes—I suppose so, George.

GEORGE: [*aghast*] George!

MRS FITZGERALD: [*nervously*] Oh—I'm sorry...

MRS PEARSON: [*impatiently*] What does it matter? Your name's George, isn't it? Who d'you think you are—Duke of Edinburgh?

GEORGE: [*angrily*] What's he got to do with it? Just tell me that. And isn't it bad enough without her calling me George? No tea. Pompy-ompy Pearson. And poor Doris has been crying her eyes out upstairs—yes, crying her eyes out.

MRS FITZGERALD: [*wailing*] Oh—dear—I ought to have known...

GEORGE: [*staring at her, annoyed*] *You* ought to have known! Why ought you to have known? Nothing to do with you, Mrs Fitzgerald. Look—we're at sixes and sevens here just now—so perhaps you'll excuse us...

MRS PEARSON: [*before Mrs Fitzgerald can reply*] I won't excuse you, George Pearson. Next time a friend and neighbour comes to see me, just say something when you see her—Good evening or How d'you do? or something—an' don't just march in an' sit down without a word. It's bad manners...

MRS FITZGERALD: [*nervously*] No—it's all right...

MRS PEARSON: No, it isn't all right. We'll have some decent manners in this house—or I'll know the reason why. [*glaring at George*] Well?

GEORGE: [*intimidated*] Well, what!

MRS PEARSON: [*taunting him*] Why don't you get off to your club? Special night tonight, isn't it? They'll be waiting for you—wanting to have a good laugh. Go on then. Don't disappoint 'em.

GEORGE: [*bitterly*] That's right. Make me look silly in front of her now! Go on—don't mind me. Sixes and sevens! Poor Doris been crying her eyes out! Getting the neighbours in to see the fun! [*suddenly losing his temper, glaring at Mrs Pearson, and shouting*] All right—let her hear it. What's the matter with you? Have you gone barmy—or what?

MRS PEARSON: [*jumping up; savagely*] If you shout at me again like that, George Pearson, I'll slap your big, fat, silly face…

MRS FITZGERALD: [*moaning*] Oh—no—no—no—please, Mrs Fitzgerald… [*Mrs Pearson sits.*]

GEORGE: [*staring at her, bewildered*] Either I'm off my chump or you two are. How d'you mean—"No, no—please, Mrs Fitzgerald"? Look—*you're* Mrs Fitzgerald. So why are you telling yourself to stop when you're not doing anything? Tell *her* to stop—then there'd be some sense in it. [*Staring at Mrs Pearson*] I think you must be tiddly.

MRS PEARSON: [*starting up; savagely*] Say that again, George Pearson.

GEORGE: [*intimidated*] All right—all right—all right …

[*Doris enters left slowly, looking miserable. She is still wearing the wrap. Mrs Pearson sits on the settee.*]

MRS FITZGERALD: Hello — Doris dear!

DORIS: [*miserably*] Hello—Mrs Fitzgerald!

MRS FITZGERALD: I thought you were going out with Charlie Spence tonight.

DORIS: [*annoyed*] What's that to do with you?

MRS PEARSON: [*sharply*] Stop that!

MRS FITZGERALD: [*nervously*] No—its all right…

MRS PEARSON: [*severely*] It isn't all right. I won't have a daughter of mine talking to anybody like that. Now answer Mrs Fitzgerald properly, Doris—or go upstairs again… [*Doris looks wonderingly at her father.*]

GEORGE: [*in despair*] Don't look at me. I give it up. I just give it up.

MRS PEARSON: [*fiercely*] Well? Answer her.

DORIS: [*sulkily*] I was going out with Charlie Spence tonight—but now I've called it off…

MRS FITZGERALD: Oh—what a pity, dear! Why have you?

DORIS: [*with a flash of temper*] Because—if you must know—my mother's been going on at memaking me feel miserable—an' saying he's got buck-teeth and is half-witted…

MRS FITZGERALD: [*rather bolder; to Mrs Pearson*] Oh—you shouldn't have said that…

MRS PEARSON: [*sharply*] Mrs Fitzgerald, I'll manage my family—you manage yours.

GEORGE: [*grimly*] Ticking *her* off now, are you, Annie?

MRS PEARSON: [*even more grimly*] They're waiting for you at the club, George, don't forget. And don't you start crying again, Doris…

MRS FITZGERALD: [*getting up; with sudden decision*] That's enough—quite enough.

[*George and Doris stare at her bewildered.*]

[*to George and Doris*] Now listen, you two. I want to have a private little talk with Mrs Fitz—[*she corrects herself hastily*] with Mrs Pearson, so I'll be obliged if you'll leave us alone for a few minutes. I'll let you know when we've finished. Go on, please. I promise you that you won't regret it. There's something here that only I can deal with.

GEORGE: [*rising*] I'm glad somebody can—'cos I can't. Come on, Doris.

[*George and Doris exit left. As they go Mrs Fitzgerald moves to left of the small table and sits. She eagerly beckons Mrs Pearson to do the same thing.*]

MRS FITZGERALD: Mrs Fitzgerald, we must change back now—we really must…

MRS PEARSON: [*rising*] Why?

MRS FITZGERALD: Because this has gone far enough. I can see they're all miserable—and I can't bear it…

MRS PEARSON: A bit more of the same would do 'em good. Making a great difference already… [*She moves to right of the table and sits.*]

MRS FITZGERALD: No, I can't stand any more of it—I really can't. We must change back. Hurry up, please, Mrs Fitzgerald.

MRS PEARSON: Well—if you insist…

MRS FITZGERALD: Yes—I do—please—*please.*

[*She stretches her hands across the table eagerly. Mrs Pearson takes them.*]

MRS PEARSON: Quiet now. Relax.

[*Mrs Pearson and Mrs Fitzgerald stare at each other. Muttering; exactly as before. Arshtatta dum—arshtatta lam—arshtatta lamdumbona...*

*They carry out the same action as before, going lax and then coming to life. But this time, of course, they become their proper personalities.*]

MRS FITZGERALD: Ah well—I enjoyed that.

MRS PEARSON: I didn't.

MRS FITZGERALD: Well, you ought to have done. Now—listen, Mrs Pearson. Don't go soft on 'em again, else it'll all have been wasted...

MRS PEARSON: I'll try not to, Mrs Fitzgerald.

MRS FITZGERALD: They've not had as long as I'd like to have given 'em—another hour or two's rough treatment might have made it certain...

MRS PEARSON: I'm sure they'll do better now—though I don't know how I'm going to explain...

MRS FITZGERALD: [*severely*] Don't you start any explaining or apologising—or you're done for.

MRS PEARSON: [*with spirit*] It's all right for you, Mrs Fitzgerald. After all, they aren't your husband and children...

MRS FITZGERALD: [*impressively*] Now you listen to me. You admitted yourself you were spoiling 'em—and they didn't appreciate you. Any apologies—any explanations—an' you'll be straight back where you were. I'm warning you, dear. Just give 'em a look—a tone of voice—now an' again, to suggest you might be tough with 'em if you wanted to be—an' it ought to work. Anyhow, we can test it.

MRS PEARSON: How?

MRS FITZGERALD: Well, what is it you'd like 'em to do that they don't do? Stop at home for once?

MRS PEARSON: Yes—and give me a hand with supper...

MRS FITZGERALD: Anything you'd like 'em to do—that you enjoy whether they do or not?

MRS PEARSON: [*hesitating*] Well—yes. I—like a nice game of rummy—but, of course, I hardly ever have one—except at Christmas...

MRS FITZGERALD: [*getting up*] That'll do then. [*She moves towards the door left then turns*] But remember—keep firm—or you've had

it. [*She opens the door. Calling*] Hoy! You can come in now. [*Coming away from the door, and moving right slightly. Quietly*] But remember—remember—a firm hand.

[*George, Doris and Cyril file in through the doorway, looking apprehensively at Mrs Pearson.*]

I'm just off. To let you enjoy yourself.

[*The family looks anxiously at Mrs Pearson, who smiles. Much relieved, they smile back at her.*]

DORIS: [*anxiously*] Yes, Mother?

MRS PEARSON: [*smiling*] Seeing that you don't want to go out, I tell you what I thought we'd do.

MRS FITZGERALD: [*giving a final warning*] Remember!

MRS PEARSON: [*nodding, then looking sharply at the family*] No objections, I hope?

GEORGE: [*humbly*] No, Mother—whatever you say...

MRS PEARSON: [*smiling*] I thought we'd have a nice family game of rummy—and then you children could get the supper ready while I have a talk with your father...

GEORGE: [*firmly*] Suits me. [*He looks challengingly at the children.*] What about you two?

CYRIL: [*hastily*] Yes—that's all right.

DORIS: [*hesitating*] Well—I...

MRS PEARSON: [*sharply*] What? Speak up!

DORIS: [*hastily*] Oh—I think it would be lovely...

MRS PEARSON: [*smiling*] Good-bye, Mrs Fitzgerald. Come again soon.

MRS FITZGERALD: Yes, dear. 'Night all—have a nice time.

[*Mrs Fitzgerald exits left and the family cluster round Mother as—*

***the curtain falls.***

## Reading with Insight

1. This play, written in the 1950s, is a humorous and satirical depiction of the status of the mother in the family.
   (i) What are the issues it raises?
   (ii) Do you think it caricatures these issues or do you think that the problems it raises are genuine? How does the play resolve the issues? Do you agree with the resolution?
2. If you were to write about these issues today what are some of the incidents, examples and problems that you would think of as relevant?
3. Is drama a good medium for conveying a social message? Discuss.
4. Read the play out in parts. Enact the play on a suitable occasion.
5. Discuss in groups plays or films with a strong message of social reform that you have watched.

11073CH07

# 4
# Birth

A.J. Cronin

*In this excerpt from The Citadel, Andrew Manson, newly out of medical school, has just begun his medical practice as an assistant to Dr Edward Page in the small Welsh mining town of Blaenelly. As he is returning from a disappointing evening with Christine, the girl he loves, he is met by Joe Morgan. Joe and his wife, who have been married nearly twenty years, are expecting their first child.*



THOUGH it was nearly midnight when Andrew reached Bryngower, he found Joe Morgan waiting for him, walking up and down with short steps between the closed surgery and the entrance to the house. At the sight of him the burly driller's face expressed relief.

"Eh, Doctor, I'm glad to see you. I been back and forward here this last hour. The missus wants ye—before time, too."

Andrew, abruptly recalled from the contemplation of his own affairs, told Morgan to wait. He went into the house for his bag, then together they set out for Number 12 Blaina Terrace. The night air was cool and deep with quiet mystery. Usually so perceptive, Andrew now felt dull and listless. He had no premonition that this night call would prove unusual, still less that it would influence his whole future in Blaenelly.

The two men walked in silence until they reached the door of Number 12, then Joe drew up short.

"I'll not come in," he said, and his voice showed signs of strain. "But, man, I know ye'll do well for us."

Inside, a narrow stair led up to a small bedroom, clean but poorly furnished, and lit only by an oil lamp. Here Mrs Morgan's mother, a tall, grey-haired woman of nearly seventy, and the stout, elderly midwife waited beside the patient, watching Andrew's expression as he moved about the room.

"Let me make you a cup of tea, Doctor, *bach*," said the former quickly, after a few moments.

Andrew smiled faintly. He saw that the old woman, wise in experience, realised there must be a period of waiting that, she was afraid he would leave the case, saying he would return later.

"Don't fret, mother, I'll not run away."

Down in the kitchen he drank the tea which she gave him. Overwrought as he was, he knew he could not snatch even an hour's sleep if he went home. He knew, too, that the case here would demand all his attention. A queer lethargy of spirit came upon him. He decided to remain until everything was over.

An hour later he went upstairs again, noted the progress made, came down once more, sat by the kitchen fire. It was still, except for the rustle of a cinder in the grate and the slow tick-tock of the wall clock. No, there was another sound—the beat of Morgan's footsteps as he paced in the street outside. The old woman opposite him sat in her black dress, quite motionless, her eyes strangely alive and wise, probing, never leaving his face.

His thoughts were heavy, muddled. The episode he had witnessed at Cardiff station still obsessed him morbidly. He thought of Bramwell, foolishly devoted to a woman who deceived him sordidly, of Edward Page, bound to the shrewish Blodwen, of Denny, living unhappily, apart from his wife. His reason told him that all these marriages were dismal failures. It was a conclusion which, in his present state, made him wince. He wished to consider marriage as an idyllic state; yes, he could not otherwise consider it with the image of Christine before him. Her eyes, shining towards him, admitted no other conclusion. It was the conflict between his level, doubting mind and his overflowing heart which left him resentful and confused. He let his chin sink upon his chest, stretched out his legs, stared broodingly into the fire. He remained like this so long, and his thoughts were so filled with Christine, that he started when the old woman opposite suddenly addressed him. Her meditation had pursued a different course.

"Susan said not to give her the chloroform if it would harm the baby. She's awful set upon this child, Doctor, *bach*." Her old eyes warmed at a sudden thought. She added in a low tone: "Ay, we all are, I fancy."

He collected himself with an effort.

"It won't do any harm, the anaesthetic," he said kindly. "They'll be all right."

Here the nurse's voice was heard calling from the top landing. Andrew glanced at the clock, which now showed half-past three. He rose and went up to the bedroom. He perceived that he might now begin his work.

An hour elapsed. It was a long, harsh struggle. Then, as the first streaks of dawn strayed past the broken edges of the blind, the child was born, lifeless.

As he gazed at the still form a shiver of horror passed over Andrew. After all that he had promised! His face, heated with his own exertions, chilled suddenly. He hesitated, torn between his desire to attempt to resuscitate the child, and his obligation towards the mother, who was herself in a desperate state. The dilemma was so urgent he did not solve it consciously. Blindly, instinctively, he gave the child to the nurse and turned his attention to Susan Morgan who now lay collapsed, almost pulseless, and not yet out of the ether, upon her side. His haste was desperate, a frantic race against her ebbing strength. It took him only an instant to smash a glass ampule and inject the medicine. Then he flung down the hypodermic syringe and worked unsparingly to restore the flaccid woman. After a few minutes of feverish effort, her heart strengthened; he saw that he might safely leave her. He swung round, in his shirt sleeves, his hair sticking to his damp brow.

"Where's the child?"

The midwife made a frightened gesture. She had placed it beneath the bed.

In a flash Andrew knelt down. Fishing amongst the sodden newspapers below the bed, he pulled out the child. A boy, perfectly formed. The limp, warm body was white and soft as tallow[1]. The cord, hastily slashed, lay like a broken stem. The skin was of a lovely texture, smooth and tender. The head lolled on the thin neck. The limbs seemed boneless.

Still kneeling, Andrew stared at the child with a haggard frown. The whiteness meant only one thing: asphyxia, pallida[2], and his mind, unnaturally tense, raced back to a case he once had seen in the Samaritan, to the treatment that had been used. Instantly he was on his feet.

"Get me hot water and cold water," he threw out to the nurse. "And basins too. Quick! Quick!"

"But, Doctor—" she faltered, her eyes on the pallid body of the child.

"*Quick*!" he shouted.

Snatching a blanket, he laid the child upon it and began the special method of respiration. The basins arrived, the ewer, the big iron kettle. Frantically

[1] the hard fat of animals melted and used to make soap, candles etc.

[2] suffocation or unconscious condition caused by lack of oxygen and excess of carbon dioxide in the blood, accompanied by paleness of the skin, weak pulse, and loss of reflexes

he splashed cold water into one basin; into the other he mixed water as hot as his hand could bear. Then, like some crazy juggler, he hurried the child between the two, now plunging it into the icy, now into the steaming bath.

Fifteen minutes passed. Sweat was now running into Andrew's eyes, blinding him. One of his sleeves hung down, dripping. His breath came pantingly. But no breath came from the lax body of the child.

A desperate sense of defeat pressed on him, a raging hopelessness. He felt the midwife watching him in stark consternation, while there, pressed back against the wall where she had all the time remained—her hand pressed to her throat, uttering no sound, her eyes burning upon him—was the old woman. He remembered her longing for a grandchild, as great as had been her daughter's longing for this child. All dashed away now; futile, beyond remedy…

The floor was now a draggled mess. Stumbling over a sopping towel, Andrew almost dropped the child, which was now wet and slippery in his hands, like a strange, white fish.

"For mercy's sake, Doctor," whimpered the midwife. "It's stillborn."

Andrew did not heed her. Beaten, despairing, having laboured in vain for half an hour, he still persisted in one last effort, rubbing the child with a rough towel, crushing and releasing the little chest with both his hands, trying to get breath into that limp body.

And then, as by a miracle, the pigmy chest, which his hands enclosed, gave a short, convulsive heave, another… and another… Andrew turned giddy. The sense of life, springing beneath his fingers after all that unavailing striving, was so exquisite it almost made him faint. He redoubled his efforts feverishly. The child was gasping now, deeper and deeper. A bubble of mucus came from one tiny nostril, a joyful iridescent bubble. The limbs were no longer boneless. The head no longer lay back spinelessly. The blanched skin was slowly turning pink. Then, exquisitely, came the child's cry.

"Dear Father in heaven," the nurse sobbed hysterically. "It's come—it's come alive."

Andrew handed her the child. He felt weak and dazed. About him the room lay in a shuddering litter: blankets, towels, basins, soiled instruments, the hypodermic syringe impaled by its point in the linoleum, the ewer knocked over, the kettle on its side in a puddle of water. Upon the huddled bed the mother still dreamed her way quietly through the anaesthetic. The old woman still stood against the wall. But her hands were together, her lips moved without sound. She was praying.

Mechanically Andrew wrung out his sleeve, pulled on his jacket.

"I'll fetch my bag later, nurse."

He went downstairs, through the kitchen into the scullery[3]. His lips were dry. At the scullery he took a long drink of water. He reached for his hat and coat.

Outside he found Joe standing on the pavement with a tense, expectant face.

"All right, Joe," he said thickly. "Both all right."

It was quite light. Nearly five o'clock.

A few miners were already in the streets: the first of the night shift moving out. As Andrew walked with them, spent and slow, his footfalls echoing with the others under the morning sky, he kept thinking blindly, oblivious to all other work he had done in Blaenelly, "I've done something; oh, God! I've done something real at last."

READING WITH INSIGHT

1. "I have done something; oh, God! I've done something real at last." Why does Andrew say this? What does it mean?
2. There lies a great difference between textbook medicine and the world of a practising physician. Discuss.
3. Do you know of any incident when someone has been brought back to life from the brink of death through medical help. Discuss medical procedures such as organ transplant and organ regeneration that are used to save human life.

[3] a room for washing dishes and for similar work

11073CH08

# 5
# The Tale of Melon City

Vikram Seth

*The following poem is taken from Mappings which was published in 1981 and is included in the Collected Poems by Vikram Seth.*

*The king, in this poem, is 'just and placid.' Does he carry his notion of justice a bit too far?*



(After Idries Shah)

In the city of which I sing
There was a just and placid King.

The King proclaimed an arch should be
Constructed, that triumphally

Would span the major thoroughfare
To edify spectators there.

The workmen went and built the thing.
They did so since he was the King.

The King rode down the thoroughfare
To edify spectators there.

Under the arch he lost his crown.
The arch was built too low. A frown

Appeared upon his placid face.
The King said, 'This is a disgrace.

The chief of builders will be hanged.'
The rope and gallows were arranged.

The chief of builders was led out.
He passed the King. He gave a shout,

'O King, it was the workmen's fault'
'Oh!' said the King, and called a halt

To the proceedings. Being just
(And placider now) he said, 'I must

Have all the workmen hanged instead.'
The workmen looked surprised, and said,

'O King, you do not realise
The bricks were made of the wrong size.'

'Summon the masons!' said the King.
The masons stood there quivering.

'It was the architect…', they said,
The architect was summoned.

'Well, architect,' said His Majesty.
'I do ordain that you shall be

Hanged.' Said the architect, 'O King,
You have forgotten one small thing.

*You* made certain amendments to
The plans when I showed them to *you.'*

The King heard this. The King saw red.
In fact he nearly lost his head;

But being a just and placid King
He said, 'This is a tricky thing.

I need some counsel. Bring to me
The wisest man in this country.'

The wisest man was found and brought,
Nay, carried, to the Royal Court.

He could not walk and could not see,
So old (and therefore wise) was he —

But in a quavering[1] voice he said,
'The culprit must be punished.

Truly, the arch it was that banged
The crown off, and it must be hanged'.

To the scaffold[2] the arch was led
When suddenly a Councillor said —

'How can we hang so shamefully
What touched your head, Your Majesty?'

'True,' mused the King. By now the crowd,
Restless, was muttering aloud.

The King perceived their mood and trembled
And said to all who were assembled —

'Let us postpone consideration
Of finer points like guilt. The nation

Wants a hanging. Hanged must be
Someone, and that immediately.'

The noose was set up somewhat high.
Each man was measured by and by.

But only one man was so tall
He fitted. One man. That was all.

He was the King. His Majesty
Was therefore hanged by Royal Decree.

[1] trembling
[2] platform for the execution of criminals

'Thank Goodness we found someone,' said
The Ministers, 'for if instead

We had not, the unruly town
Might well have turned against the Crown.'

'Long live the King!' the Ministers said.
'Long live the King! The King is dead.'

They pondered the dilemma; then,
Being practical-minded men,

Sent out the heralds to proclaim
(In His [former] Majesty's name):

'The next to pass the City Gate
Will choose the ruler of our state,

As is our custom. This will be
Enforced with due ceremony.'

A man passed by the City Gate.
An idiot. The guards cried, 'Wait!

Who is to be the King? Decide!'
'A melon,' the idiot replied.

This was his standard answer to
All questions. (He liked melons.) 'You

Are now our King,' the Ministers said,
Crowning a melon. Then they led

(Carried) the Melon to the throne
And reverently set it down.

* * *

This happened years and years ago.
When now you ask the people, 'So —

Your King appears to be a melon.
How did this happen?', they say, 'Well, on

Account of customary choice.
If His Majesty rejoice

In being a melon, that's OK
With us, for who are we to say

What he should be as long as he
Leaves us in Peace and Liberty?'

The principles of *laissez faire*
Seem to be well-established there.

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READING WITH INSIGHT

1. Narrate 'The Tale of Melon City' in your own words.
2. What impression would you form of a state where the King was 'just and placid'?
3. How, according to you, can peace and liberty be maintained in a state?
4. Suggest a few instances in the poem which highlight humour and irony.
5. 'The Tale of Melon City' has been narrated in a verse form. This is a unique style which lends extra charm to an ancient tale. Find similar examples in your language. Share them in the class.

# NOTES

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