

The Open Window

by H. H. Munro (Saki)

"My aunt will be down presently, Mr. Nuttel," said a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen; "in the meantime you must try and put up with me."

Framton Nuttel endeavored to say the correct something which should duly flatter the niece of the moment without unduly discounting the aunt that was to come. Privately he doubted more than ever whether these formal visits on a succession of total strangers would do much towards helping the nerve cure which he was supposed to be undergoing.

"I know how it will be," his sister had said when he was preparing to migrate to this rural retreat; "you will bury yourself down there and not speak to a living soul, and your nerves will be worse than ever from moping. I shall just give you letters of introduction to all the people I know there. Some of them, as far as I can remember, were quite nice."

Framton wondered whether Mrs. Sappleton, the lady to whom he was presenting one of the letters of introduction, came into the nice division.

"Do you know many of the people round here?" asked the niece, when she judged that they had had sufficient silent communion.

"Hardly a soul," said Framton. "My sister was staying here, at the rectory, you know, some four years ago, and she gave me letters of introduction to some of the people here."

He made the last statement in a tone of distinct regret. "Then you know practically nothing about my aunt?" pursued the self-possessed young lady. "Only her name and address," admitted the caller. He was wondering whether Mrs. Sappleton was in the married or widowed state. An undefinable something about the room seemed to suggest masculine habitation.

"Her great tragedy happened just three years ago," said the child; "that would be since your sister's time." "Her tragedy?" asked Framton; somehow in this restful country spot tragedies seemed out of place. "You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon," said the niece, indicating a large French window that opened on to a lawn. "It is quite warm for the time of the year," said Framton; "but has that window got anything to do with the tragedy?" "Out through that window, three years ago to a day, her husband and her two young brothers went off for their day's shooting. They never came back."

In crossing the moor to their favorite snipeshooting ground they were all three engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog. It had been that dreadful wet summer, you know, and places that were safe in other years gave way suddenly without warning. Their bodies were never recovered. That was the dreadful part of it." Here the child's voice lost its self-possessed note and became falteringly human.

"Poor aunt always thinks that they will come back some day, they and the little brown spaniel that was lost with them, and walk in at that window just as they used to do. That is why the window is kept open every evening till it is quite dusk. Poor dear aunt, she has often told me how they went out, her husband with his white waterproof coat over his arm, and Ronnie, her youngest brother, singing 'Bertie, why do you bound?' as he always did to tease her, because she said it got on her nerves. Do you know, sometimes on still, quiet evenings like this, I almost get a creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window - "

She broke off with a little shudder. It was a relief to Framton when the aunt hustled into the room with a whirl of apologies for being late in making her appearance.

"I hope Vera has been amusing you?" she said.

"She has been very interesting," said Framton.

"I hope you don't mind the open window," said Mrs. Sappleton briskly; "my husband and brothers will be home directly from shooting, and they always come in this way. They've been out for snipe in the marshes to-day, so they'll make a fine mess over my poor carpets. So like you men-folk, isn't it?"

She rattled on cheerfully about the shooting and the scarcity of birds, and the prospects for duck in the winter. To Framton it was all purely horrible. He made a desperate but only partially successful effort to turn the talk on to a less ghastly topic; he was conscious that his hostess was giving him only a fragment of her attention, and her eyes were constantly straying past him to the open window and the lawn beyond. It was certainly an unfortunate coincidence that he should have paid his visit on this tragic anniversary.

"The doctors agree in ordering me complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise," announced Framton, who labored under the tolerably wide-spread delusion that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one's ailments and infirmities, their cause and cure. "On the matter of diet they are not so much in agreement," he continued.

"No?" said Mrs. Sappleton, in a voice which only replaced a yawn at the last moment. Then she suddenly brightened into alert attention - but not to what Framton was saying.

"Here they are at last!" she cried. "Just in time for tea, and don't they look as if they were muddy up to the eyes!"

Framton shivered slightly and turned towards the niece with a look intended to convey sympathetic comprehension. The child was staring out through the open window with dazed horror in her eyes. In a chill shock of nameless fear Framton swung round in his seat and looked in the same direction.

In the deepening twilight three figures were walking across the lawn towards the window; they all carried guns under their arms, and one of them was additionally burdened with a white coat hung over his shoulders. A tired brown spaniel kept close at their heels. Noiselessly they neared the house, and then a hoarse young voice chanted out of the dusk: "I said, Bertie, why do you bound?"

Framton grabbed wildly at his stick and hat; the hall-door, the gravel-drive, and the front gate were dimly-noted stages in his headlong retreat. A cyclist coming along the road had to run into the hedge to avoid an imminent collision.

"Here we are, my dear," said the bearer of the white mackintosh, coming in through the window; "fairly muddy, but most of it's dry. Who was that who bolted out as we came up?" "A most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel," said Mrs. Sappleton; "could only talk about his illnesses, and dashed off without a word of good-bye or apology when you arrived. One would think he had seen a ghost."

"I expect it was the spaniel," said the niece calmly; "he told me he had a horror of dogs. He was once hunted into a cemetery somewhere on the banks of the Ganges by a pack of pariah dogs, and had to spend the night in a newly dug grave with the creatures snarling and grinning and foaming just above him. Enough to make anyone their nerve."

Romance at short notice was her speciality.

Name:

Class:

Before Reading

Read the following statements. Tell whether you agree or disagree by circling your response.

Lying is always wrong Agree Disagree

Meeting new people is awkward Agree Disagree

Some people are better at socializing than others Agree Disagree

You should never trust someone you just met Agree Disagree

There are no coincidences in life Agree Disagree

Ghosts are real Agree Disagree

Meeting your neighbors is a necessary step when moving Agree Disagree

It is impolite to ask someone personal questions Agree Disagree

You should never show your anger in front of others Agree Disagree

It is more important to be polite than to be honest Agree Disagree

The Open Window by Saki

"The Open Window" is a short story set in the early 1900s in Great Britain, during the Edwardian Era. The story takes place at a Victorian style home in the countryside. During this era, there were harsh guidelines people had to follow to maintain proper social etiquette. For example, there were strict dress codes that you had to adhere to, even if you were just meeting a friend for casual tea. The British people during this time were also not allowed to show any obvious signs of emotions such as anger or sadness. People had to always exhibit absolute control, no matter how they were actually feeling inside; they were to never talk about topics that were too personal or controversial.

During Reading Questions

After reading the short story, "The Open Window" by Saki, answer the following questions.

1. Based off the following lines, what can readers determine about Vera? "My aunt will be down presently, Mr. Nuttel," said a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen; "in the meantime you must try and put up with me."
2. What condition is Mr. Nuttel suffering from?

3. What does Mr Nuttel's sister think will happen on his rural retreat to the country? How does she try to help him out?

PREVIEW

4. What is the initial interaction like between Mr. Nuttel and Vera? Use a quote from the text to support your answer.

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5. What is the tragedy about Mrs. Sappleton that Vera reveals to Nuttel?

PREVIEW

6. Why do you think the author chose the name Framton Nuttel? Is there any significance?

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7. How is the following line an example of irony? "He dashed off without a word of good-bye or apology when you arrived. One would think he had seen a ghost."

PREVIEW

8. What lie does Vera tell at the end of the story to explain Mr. Nuttel's behavior?

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9. What example of dramatic irony is present in the story?

PREVIEW

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10. How is Mr. Nuttel's fast departure an example of situational irony?

After Reading Questions

1. Was Vera's prank harmless? Why or why not?

PREVIEW

2. Do you feel sorry for Mr. Nuttel? Why or why not?

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3. How does the setting (Edwardian Era) impact the plot? How does social etiquette work in Vera's favor?

PREVIEW

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4. Do you think Mr. Nuttel's nervous condition has changed because of this incident? Explain.

5. What makes Vera's stories so believable?

PREVIEW

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6. Do you ever feel socially awkward? Name a situation that would make you uncomfortable.

7. Would you find yourself struggling in a strict society such as the Edwardian era? Why or why not?

PREVIEW

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8. If you were Mr. Nuttel, what would you have done when you saw the men walk through the window? Would you have also run?

Answer Keys
Before Reading

Read the following statements. Tell whether you agree or disagree by circling your response.

Answers Will Vary

PREVIEW

Lying is always wrong Agree Disagree

Meeting new people is awkward Agree Disagree

Some people are better at socializing than others Agree Disagree

You should never trust someone you just met Agree Disagree

There are no coincidences in life Agree Disagree

Ghosts are real Agree Disagree

Meeting your neighbors is a necessary step when moving Agree Disagree

It is impolite to ask someone personal questions Agree Disagree

You should never show your anger in front of others Agree Disagree

It is more important to be polite than to be honest Agree Disagree

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"The Open Window" is a short story set in the early 1900s in Great Britain, during the Edwardian Era. The story takes place at a Victorian style home in the countryside. During this era, there were harsh guidelines people had to follow to maintain proper social etiquette. For example, there were strict dress codes that you had to adhere to, even if you were just meeting a friend for casual tea. The British people during this time were also not allowed to show any obvious signs of emotions such as anger or sadness. People had to always exhibit absolute control, no matter how they were actually feeling inside; they were to never talk about topics that were too personal or controversial.

During Reading Questions

After reading the short story, "The Open Window" by Saki, answer the following questions.

1. Based off the following lines, what can readers determine about Vera? "My aunt will be down presently, Mr. Nuttel," said a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen; "in the meantime you must try and put up with me."

Vera is self-possessed, so she has great control over her feelings and emotions. She is not impulsive nor emotional which is atypical of teenagers. She also says "you must put up with me" as if to imply she is no one important, possibly so Mr. Nuttel would let his guard down.

2. What condition is Mr. Nuttel suffering from?

He has a very nervous personality; he doesn't like socializing with people as he tends to overthink things. He could have an anxiety disorder.

3. What does Mr Nuttel's sister think will happen on his rural retreat to the country? How does she try to help him out?

She believes he will stay in complete isolation and mope around. She thinks his condition will worsen, so she writes letters of introduction he can use to become aquatinted with the neighbors.

PREVIEW

4. What is the initial interaction like between Mr. Nuttel and Vera? Use a quote from the text to support your answer.

Mr. Nuttel and Vera's interactions begin very cordial and respectable. He is thinking about everything he says and is consciously trying to remain polite. The text states, he "endeavored to say the correct something which should duly flatter the niece of the moment without unduly discounting the aunt that was to come." This statement tells readers that Mr. Nuttel is aware of the social etiquette laws and is following proper procedures.

5. What is the tragedy about Mrs. Sappleton that Vera reveals to Nuttel?

Her husband, two brothers, and dog went hunting when they were engulfed in a hazardous bog. Their bodies were not recovered and Mrs. Sappleton has never dealt with their deaths; she believes they will still come home one day.

6. Why do you think the author chose the name Framton Nuttel? Is there any significance?

Readers can conclude that Mr. Nuttel is a little bit "nutty" because he overthinks everything and is jittery and skittish.

7. How is the following line an example of irony? He dashed off without a word of good-bye or apology when you arrived. One would think he had seen a ghost.

It is ironic because Mrs. Sappleton doesn't know it, but Mr. Nuttel did actually believe that he had seen a ghost.

8. What lie does Vera tell at the end of the story to explain Mr. Nuttel's behavior?

He had a fear of dogs because he was once hunted by a pack pf pariah dogs and forced to spend a night hiding out in a grave.

9. What example of dramatic irony is present in the story?

The readers (and Vera) know that Vera has told a lie to all the other characters. Mr. Nuttel, Mrs. Sappleton, her husband, and the brothers are all oblivious to what has occurred prior to the men's return home.

10. How is Mr. Nuttel's fast departure an example of situational irony?

Mr. Nuttel was so concerned about maintaining formality and being polite, yet his fear of the "ghosts" ironically resulted in Mr. Nuttel running out of the house, knocking down a cyclist, which to everyone else actually seemed like extremely rude behavior.

After Reading Questions

1. Was Vera's prank harmless? Why or why not? **Answers Will Vary**

PREVIEW

2. Do you feel sorry for Mr. Nuttel? Why or why not? **Answers Will Vary**

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3. How does the setting (Edwardian Era) impact the plot? How does social etiquette work in Vera's favor?

Mr. Nuttel's concentration on maintaining proper etiquette allows Vera to get away with her lies. He never questions Mrs. Sappleton or Vera because that would be rude. He accepts the story as truth because he doesn't want to break social expectations.

PREVIEW

4. Do you think Mr. Nuttel's nervous condition has changed because of this incident? Explain.

Answers Will Vary

5. What makes Vera's stories so believable?

Vera uses a lot of detail and she is very quick. "Romance at short notice was her speciality," meaning she could think of mysterious, fun stories on quick notice.

PREVIEW

6. Do you ever feel socially awkward? Name a situation that would make you uncomfortable.

Answers Will Vary

PREVIEW

7. Would you find yourself struggling in a strict society such as the Edwardian era? Why or why not?

Answers Will Vary

PREVIEW

8. If you were Mr. Nuttel, what would you have done when you saw the men walk through the window? Would you have also run? **Answers Will Vary**

PREVIEW

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