



# CONTENTS

<b>Part I Fiction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Plot</b>	<b>3</b>
The Story of an Hour <i>Kate Chopin</i>	6
The Girls in Their Summer Dresses <i>Irwin Shaw</i>	9
<b>Chapter 2 Character and Characterization</b>	<b>20</b>
Astronomer's Wife <i>Kay Boyle</i>	23
Everyday Use <i>Alice Walker</i>	30
<b>Chapter 3 Theme</b>	<b>41</b>
I Want to Know Why <i>Sherwood Anderson</i>	42
A Rose for Emily <i>William Faulkner</i>	53
<b>Chapter 4 Point of View</b>	<b>64</b>
Haircut <i>Ring Lardner</i>	67
A Little Cloud <i>James Joyce</i>	80
<b>Chapter 5 Style, Tone, and Irony</b>	<b>95</b>
A Clean, Well-Lighted Place <i>Ernest Hemingway</i>	98
The Black Cat <i>Edgar Allan Poe</i>	103
<b>Chapter 6 Symbol</b>	<b>115</b>
The Fly <i>Katherine Mansfield</i>	118
The Lottery <i>Shirley Jackson</i>	124
<b>Chapter 7 Types of Fiction</b>	<b>134</b>
The Mark on the Wall <i>Virginia Woolf</i>	140
Lost in the Funhouse <i>John Barth</i>	148



## Part II Poetry

173

### Chapter 1 Alliteration, Assonance, and Rhyme 175

Full Fathom Five <i>William Shakespeare</i>	178
Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind <i>William Shakespeare</i>	179
To — <i>Percy Bysshe Shelley</i>	180
The Splendor Falls <i>Alfred Tennyson</i>	181
God's Grandeur <i>Gerard Manley Hopkins</i>	183
Toads Revisited <i>Philip Larkin</i>	184

### Chapter 2 Rhythm and Meter 186

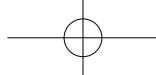
Song <i>John Donne</i>	189
Virtue <i>George Herbert</i>	190
The Oak <i>Alfred Tennyson</i>	191
When I Was One-and-Twenty <i>A. E. Housman</i>	192
Oh, Who Is That Young Sinner <i>A. E. Housman</i>	193
Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening <i>Robert Frost</i>	194
The Voice <i>Thomas Hardy</i>	196

### Chapter 3 Closed Form and Open Form 198

To Be or Not to Be <i>William Shakespeare</i>	204
On What Foundation Stands <i>Samuel Johnson</i>	206
Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night <i>Dylan Thomas</i>	208
To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time <i>Robert Herrick</i>	209
Sonnet 75 <i>Edmund Spenser</i>	210
On First Looking into Chapman's Homer <i>John Keats</i>	211
With Music Strong I Come <i>Walt Whitman</i>	213
Digging <i>Seamus Heaney</i>	214
L(a) <i>E. E. Cummings</i>	216
Me Up At Does <i>E. E. Cummings</i>	217

### Chapter 4 Diction 218

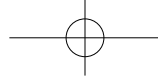
This Is Just to Say <i>William Carlos Williams</i>	221
The Red Wheel Barrow <i>William Carlos Williams</i>	222
Metamorphosis <i>Wallace Stevens</i>	223



I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud	<i>William Wordsworth</i>	224
It Is a Beauteous Evening	<i>William Wordsworth</i>	225
A Little Learning Is a Dangerous Thing	<i>Alexander Pope</i>	226
Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?	<i>Thomas Hardy</i>	227
London	<i>William Blake</i>	229
Disillusionment of Ten O’Clock	<i>Wallace Stevens</i>	230
Fire and Ice	<i>Robert Frost</i>	231
<b>Chapter 5 Figures of Speech</b>		<b>232</b>
The Eagle: A Fragment	<i>Alfred Tennyson</i>	237
Metaphors	<i>Sylvia Plath</i>	237
Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day?	<i>William Shakespeare</i>	238
A Red, Red Rose	<i>Robert Burns</i>	239
It Dropped So Low—in My Regard	<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	240
To His Coy Mistress	<i>Andrew Marvell</i>	241
Methought I Saw My Late Espousèd Saint	<i>John Milton</i>	243
Death Be Not Proud	<i>John Donne</i>	244
<b>Chapter 6 Image and Symbol</b>		<b>246</b>
Anecdote of the Jar	<i>Wallace Stevens</i>	248
Heat	<i>H.D.</i>	249
The Victory	<i>Ann Stevenson</i>	250
I Heard a Fly Buzz—When I Died	<i>Emily Dickinson</i>	251
A Noiseless Patient Spider	<i>Walt Whitman</i>	252
The Sick Rose	<i>William Blake</i>	253
The Road Not Taken	<i>Robert Frost</i>	254
The Boston Evening Transcript	<i>T. S. Eliot</i>	255
Up-hill	<i>Christina Rossetti</i>	256
The Second Coming	<i>William Butler Yeats</i>	257
<b>Chapter 7 Tone and Speaker</b>		<b>259</b>
Loveliest of Trees	<i>A. E. Housman</i>	261
My Papa’s Waltz	<i>Theodore Roethke</i>	262
The Chimney Sweeper	<i>William Blake</i>	263



On Stella's Birthday	<i>Jonathan Swift</i>	265
My Last Duchess	<i>Robert Browning</i>	266
The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock	<i>T. S. Eliot</i>	268
<b>Chapter 8 Types of Poetry</b>		<b>275</b>
I Sing of Warfare	<i>Virgil</i>	279
The Wife of Usher's Well	<i>Anonymous</i>	280
The Passionate Shepherd to His Love	<i>Christopher Marlowe</i>	283
In Time of "The Breaking of Nations"	<i>Thomas Hardy</i>	285
Nothing Gold Can Stay	<i>Robert Frost</i>	286
Ode to the West Wind	<i>Percy Bysshe Shelley</i>	287
We All Behold with Envious Eyes	<i>Jonathan Swift</i>	291
Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard	<i>Thomas Gray</i>	293
<b>Part III Drama</b>		<b>299</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Plot and Character</b>		<b>302</b>
Oedipus the King	<i>Sophocles</i>	304
<b>Chapter 2 Dialogue, Staging, and Theme</b>		<b>340</b>
Trifles	<i>Susan Glaspell</i>	342
<b>Chapter 3 Types of Drama</b>		<b>358</b>
The Dumb Waiter	<i>Harold Pinter</i>	363
<b>Literary Terms</b>		<b>405</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>		<b>417</b>

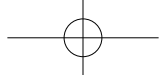


# PART I



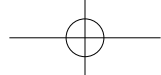
# FICTION

What do we generally expect of a work of fiction? The answer might differ from reader to reader. Yet we will surely find one element common to every reader's expectations before examining a work of fiction. That is, the expectation that the work will tell a story. Fiction, then, is a name for stories at least partially imagined. The term is most commonly associated with novels and short stories, though in this sense drama and narrative poetry may also be regarded as fictional. As a specific form of literature, fiction can be more accurately defined as a narrative told in prose, namely, the novel and the short story. Out of consideration for space, we only include short stories in our discussion of elements of fiction.



In fiction the facts are not necessarily true or historically accurate. A writer may depict actual people, events and places in his/her fictional world, but the facts are not usually his/her primary concern. What is more important is how a writer makes use of these facts. A writer leads us into a world of his/her creation and makes us accept that what is happening in the story is true. For example, Stephen Crane, the author of the American Civil War novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, was not even born when the War was fought. And yet, this novel has been regarded by many as one of the best war novels that have ever been written.

In order to appreciate and interpret fiction, we need first to learn certain characteristics or devices of fiction, each of which helps to make a literary work a unified and meaningful whole. These characteristics, called elements of fiction, consist of plot, character and characterization, theme, point of view, tone, style, symbol, etc. Understanding the functions of each individual element will certainly help us understand the story as a whole. The elements of fiction then become useful tools when we try to read and interpret fiction. They are the common ground on which we can share our reading experiences with others, and ultimately learn to appreciate and critique literary works.



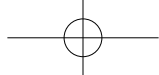
# CHAPTER 1

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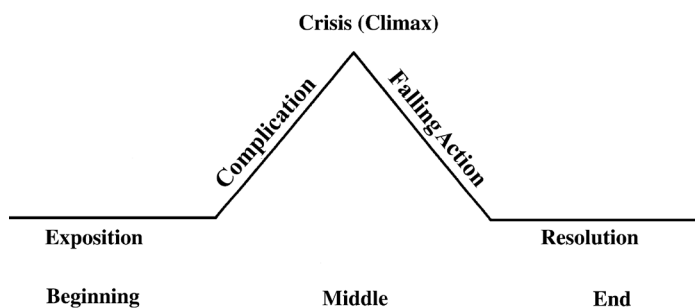
## Plot

**Plot** is the arrangement of events that make up a story. In other words, what is more important for a writer of fiction is not the simple setting down of events in a temporal sequence, but rather the arrangement of those events according to their causal relationships. That is to say, plot reveals events to us, not by recounting them in their temporal relationships, but by making us aware of the intricate pattern of cause and effect in a story. It is important that one should try to distinguish plot from story. E. M. Forster, in his *Aspects of the Novel*, discusses the difference between the two. He defines story as a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. In this sense, “The king died and then the queen died” should be regarded as a story. Plot also includes a sequence of incidents, but the emphasis is on their significant causal relationship to each other. In this sense, “The king died, and then the queen died of grief” promises a plot, since one thing happens because of—or as a result of—something else. Therefore, causality becomes the most important feature of realistic fictional plots.

Plots of most realistic stories have an identifiable beginning, middle, and end. They revolve around some significant conflict between opposing forces that is usually resolved by the end of the story. Plot, therefore, is often further defined as the element of fiction that sets up, develops, and resolves a conflict. A conflict can be either external (physical, moral, or psychological contest between antagonistic characters) or internal (moral, psychological, or spiritual struggle within the character itself). External conflicts sometimes are merely projections of internal conflicts. The



conflict is in this sense the most significant kind of action. It is this basic opposition, or tension, that engages the reader's attention. The plot of a typical realistic story usually moves through five stages. They can be diagrammed in the following manner:



- **Exposition**

Exposition is the beginning section in which the author provides the necessary background information of the story, describes the setting, and introduces characters. It helps the reader to make sense of the action later in the story.

- **Complication**

The complication, also referred to as the rising action, intensifies the conflict and leads to a crisis or moment of great tension.

- **Crisis**

Crisis, also referred to as the **climax**, is the point of greatest tension in the story. It is the turning point that precipitates the outcome of the conflict.

- **Falling Action**

Falling action is the moment when the tension subsides and the plot moves toward its resolution.





- **Resolution**

Also referred to as conclusion or **denouement** (a French word meaning the “untying of the knot”), resolution is the final section of the plot. Quite appropriately, the conventional type of plot has frequently been compared to the tying and untying of a knot. It is the moment when the complications are resolved and the outcome of the conflict is reached.

What we should be aware of is that the conventional plot patterns are not to be expected in all stories. Many stories do not follow the exact patterns of the plot and sometimes certain stages are unproportionally longer or shorter in a story. In some stories the falling action and resolution merge and become one. Many modern writers especially feel that they cannot convey their ideas successfully by using the conventional plot pattern. These writers purposely disrupt the conventional plot by focusing their interest upon psychological states. In these stories nothing is ever resolved at the end because this is exactly how these writers view life. What they try to present is how human beings grope for the meaning of existence. In consideration of all factors, the absence of conventional plot techniques should not be regarded as a flaw. Instead we should pay close attention to the way a writer arranges events in a story and see how he/she conveys the theme by such an arrangement.

There are different ways of arranging events in a plot. A writer might decide to present them chronologically, that is, arranging the events according to their occurrence in time; or he/she might want to rearrange the chronology and invert the usual order of beginning and ending. By revealing the outcome of the story at the beginning, inverted order forces the reader to shift his/her attention from what happens to why and how it happens. The most frequently used device for a writer to interrupt a chronologically ordered plot is the **flashback** (or retrospect), through which a writer can bring in the past whenever it is most relevant to the present. **Foreshadowing** is a device of equal importance, whereby a writer prepares the reader for what is yet to happen by presenting some details which hint at the direction the story will take. It is a device conducive to **suspense**, the expectant uncertainty as to the outcome of the story.



In some longer works of fiction we may discern a **subplot**, by which is meant a sequence of events distinct, at least in part, from the main plot. In most cases, the subplot is closely related to the main plot, and used as an analogy to the main plot.

Creating a plot is not a mere mechanical process. It is through plot that the author organizes the raw material of experience and expresses the meaning of a work of fiction. An understanding of plot therefore becomes the most important factor in the understanding of fiction.



## The Story of an Hour

.....  
Kate Chopin (1851–1904)

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences, veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence<sup>1</sup> of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her

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<sup>1</sup> intelligence: information



body and seemed to reach into her soul.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will—as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been.

When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: “Free, free, free!” The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial.

She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender



hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save<sup>1</sup> with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending her in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being.

“Free! Body and soul free!” she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. “Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door—you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven’s sake open the door.”

“Go away. I am not making myself ill.” No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

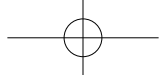
Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister’s importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister’s waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

Someone was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his

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<sup>1</sup> save: except



gripsack<sup>1</sup> and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of the accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.

But Richards was too late.

When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills.

(1894)

### Topics for discussion

1. What are the chief episodes that make up the plot?
2. Describe the plot in terms of its exposition, complication, crisis, falling action, and resolution.
3. What is the conflict on which the plot turns? Is it external, internal, or some combination of the two?
4. How would you describe the character Mrs. Mallard?
5. Is the plot plausible? How would you interpret the ending of the story?



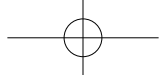
## The Girls in Their Summer Dresses

Irwin Shaw (1913–1984)

Fifth Avenue was shining in the sun when they left the Brevoort<sup>2</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> gripsack: traveling bag

<sup>2</sup> Brevoort: The Brevoort Hotel, located at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Eighth Street, was noted for its distinguished and cosmopolitan clientele.



started walking toward Washington Square<sup>1</sup>. The sun was warm, even though it was November and everything looked like Sunday morning—the buses, and the well-dressed people walking slowly in couples and the quiet buildings with the windows closed.

Michael held Frances' arm tightly as they walked downtown in the sunlight. They walked lightly, almost smiling, because they had slept late and had a good breakfast and it was Sunday. Michael unbuttoned his coat and let it flap around him in the mild wind. They walked, without saying anything, among the young and pleasant-looking people who somehow seem to make up most of the population of that section of New York City.

"Look out," Frances said, as they crossed Eighth Street. "You'll break your neck."

Michael laughed and Frances laughed with him.

"She's not so pretty, anyway," Frances said. "Anyway, not pretty enough to take a chance breaking your neck looking at her."

Michael laughed again. He laughed louder this time, but not as solidly. "She wasn't a bad-looking girl. She had a nice complexion. Country-girl complexion. How did you know I was looking at her?"

Frances cocked her head to one side and smiled at her husband under the tiptilted brim of her hat. "Mike, darling..." she said.

Michael laughed, just a little laugh this time. "O.K." he said. "The evidence is in. Excuse me. It was the complexion. It's not the sort of complexion you see much in New York. Excuse me."

Frances patted his arm lightly and pulled him along a little faster toward Washington Square.

"This is a nice morning," she said. "This is a wonderful morning. When I have breakfast with you it makes me feel good all day."

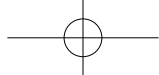
"Tonic<sup>2</sup>," Michael said. "Morning pick-up. Rolls and coffee with Mike and you're on the alkali<sup>3</sup> side, guaranteed."

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1 Washington Square: the park at the lower end of Fifth Avenue that serves as focal point for the area known as Greenwich Village, then as now, the home of artists and intellectuals

2 tonic: anything that makes people healthier or happier

3 alkali: (chemistry) any of a class of substances that neutralize acids and form caustic or corrosive solutions in water



"That's the story. Also, I slept all night, wound around you like a rope."

"Saturday night," he said. "I permit such liberties only when the week's work is done."

"You're getting fat," she said.

"Isn't it the truth? The lean man from Ohio."

"I love it," she said, "an extra five pounds of husband."

"I love it, too," Michael said gravely.

"I have an idea," Frances said.

"My wife has an idea. That pretty girl."

"Let's not see anybody all day," Frances said. "Let's just hang around with each other. You and me. We're always up to our neck in people,<sup>1</sup> drinking their Scotch, or drinking our Scotch, we only see each other in bed..."

"The Great Meeting Place," Michael said. "Stay in bed long enough and everybody you ever knew will show up there."

"Wise guy," Frances said. "I'm talking serious."

"O.K., I'm listening serious."

"I want to go out with my husband all day long. I want him to talk only to me and listen only to me."

"What's to stop us?" Michael asked. "What party intends to prevent me from seeing my wife alone on Sunday? What party?"

"The Stevensons. They want us to drop by around one o'clock and they'll drive us into the country."

"The lousy Stevensons," Mike said. "Transparent<sup>2</sup>. They can whistle. They can go driving in the country by themselves. My wife and I have to stay in New York and bore each other tête-à-tête<sup>3</sup>."

"Is it a date?"

"It's a date."

Frances leaned over and kissed him on the tip of the ear.

"Darling," Michael said. "This is Fifth Avenue."

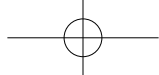
"Let me arrange a program," Frances said. "A planned Sunday in New

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1 We're always up to our neck in people: We've been very deeply involved with other people.

2 transparent: easily seen through or detected

3 bore each other tête-à-tête: make weary by tiresome talk between two people in private



York for a young couple with money to throw away.”

“Go easy.”

“First let’s go see a football game. A professional football game,” Frances said, because she knew Michael loved to watch them. “The Giants<sup>1</sup> are playing. And it’ll be nice to be outside all day today and get hungry and later we’ll go down to Cavanagh’s and get a steak as big as a blacksmith’s apron, with a bottle of wine, and after that, there’s a new French picture at the Filmarte that everybody says... Say, are you listening to me?”

“Sure,” he said. He took his eyes off the hatless girl with the dark hair, cut dancer-style, like a helmet, who was walking past him with the self-conscious strength and grace dancers have. She was walking without a coat and she looked very solid and strong and her belly was flat, like a boy’s under her skirt, and her hips swung boldly because she was a dancer and also because she knew Michael was looking at her. She smiled a little to herself as she went past and Michael noticed all these things before he looked back at his wife. “Sure,” he said, “we’re going to watch the Giants and we’re going to eat steak and we’re going to see a French picture. How do you like that?”

“That’s it,” Frances said flatly. “That’s the program for the day. Or maybe you’d just rather walk up and down Fifth Avenue.”

“No,” Michael said carefully. “Not at all.”

“You always look at other women,” Frances said. “At every damn woman in the City of New York.”

“Oh, come now,” Michael said, pretending to joke. “Only pretty ones. And, after all, how many pretty women are there in New York? Seventeen?”

“More. At least you seem to think so. Wherever you go.”

“Not the truth. Occasionally, maybe, I look at a woman as she passes. In the street. I admit, perhaps in the street I look at a woman once in a while...”

“Everywhere,” Frances said. “Every damned place we go. Restaurants, subways, theaters, lectures, concerts.”

“Now, darling,” Michael said, “I look at everything. God gave me eyes and I look at women and men and subway excavations and moving pictures

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<sup>1</sup> the Giants: a professional American football team





and the little flowers of the field. I casually inspect the universe.”

“You ought to see the look in your eye,” Frances said, “as you casually inspect the universe on Fifth Avenue.”

“I’m a happily married man.” Michael pressed her elbow tenderly, knowing what he was doing. “Example for the whole twentieth century, Mr. and Mrs. Mike Loomis.”

“You mean it?”

“Frances, baby...”

“Are you really happily married?”

“Sure,” Michael said, feeling the whole Sunday morning sinking like lead inside him. “Now what the hell is the sense in talking like that?”

“I would like to know.” Frances walked faster now, looking straight ahead, her face showing nothing, which was the way she always managed it when she was arguing or feeling bad.

“I’m wonderfully happily married,” Michael said patiently. “I am the envy of all men between the ages of fifteen and sixty in the State of New York.”

“Stop kidding,” Frances said.

“I have a fine home,” Michael said. “I got nice books and a phonograph and nice friends. I live in a town I like the way I like and I do the work I like and I live with the woman I like. Whenever something good happens, don’t I run to you? When something bad happens, don’t I cry on your shoulder?”

“Yes,” Frances said. “You look at every woman that passes.”

“That’s an exaggeration.”

“Every woman.” Frances took her hand off Michael’s arm. “If she’s not pretty you turn away fairly quickly. If she’s halfway pretty you watch her for about seven steps...”

“My Lord, Frances!”

“If she’s pretty you practically break your neck...”

“Hey, let’s have a drink,” Michael said, stopping.

“We just had breakfast.”

“Now, listen, darling,” Mike said, choosing his words with care, “it’s a nice day and we both feel good and there’s no reason why we have to break it up. Let’s have a nice Sunday.”



“I could have a fine Sunday if you didn't look as though you were dying to run after every skirt on Fifth Avenue.”

“Let's have a drink,” Michael said.

“I don't want a drink.”

“What do you want, a fight?”

“No,” Frances said so unhappily that Michael felt terribly sorry for her. “I don't want a fight. I don't know why I started this. All right, let's drop it. Let's have a good time.”

They joined hands consciously and walked without talking among the baby carriages and the old Italian men in their Sunday clothes and the young women with Scotties<sup>1</sup> in Washington Square Park.

“I hope it's a good game today,” Frances said after a while, her tone a good imitation of the tone she had used at breakfast and at the beginning of their walk. “I like professional football games. They hit each other as though they're made out of concrete. When they tackle each other,” she said, trying to make Michael laugh, “they make divots<sup>2</sup>. It's very exciting.”

“I want to tell you something,” Michael said very seriously. “I have not touched another woman. Not once. In all the five years.”

“All right,” Frances said.

“You believe that, don't you?”

“All right.”

They walked between the crowded benches, under the scrubby city park trees.

“I try not to notice it,” Frances said, as though she were talking to herself. “I try to make believe it doesn't mean anything. Some men're like that, I tell myself, they have to see what they're missing.”

“Some women're like that, too,” Michael said. “In my time I've seen a couple of ladies.”

“I haven't even looked at another man,” Frances said, walking straight ahead, “since the second time I went out with you.”

“There's no law,” Michael said.

“I feel rotten inside, in my stomach, when we pass a woman and you

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1 Scotties: Scottish terriers

2 divot: a piece of turf cut out by a golf club when making a stroke



look at her and I see that look in your eye and that's the way you looked at me the first time, in Alice Maxwell's house. Standing there in the living room, next to the radio, with a green hat on and all those people."

"I remember the hat," Michael said.

"The same look," Frances said. "And it makes me feel bad. It makes me feel terrible."

"Sssh, please, darling, sssh..."

"I think I would like a drink now," Frances said.

They walked over to a bar on Eighth Street, not saying anything, Michael automatically helping her over curbstones, and guiding her past automobiles. He walked, buttoning his coat, looking thoughtfully at his neatly shined heavy brown shoes as they made the steps toward the bar. They sat near a window in the bar and the sun streamed in, and there was a small cheerful fire in the fireplace. A little Japanese waiter came over and put down some pretzels<sup>1</sup> and smiled happily at them.

"What do you order after breakfast?" Michael asked.

"Brandy, I suppose," Frances said.

"Courvoisier<sup>2</sup>," Michael told the waiter. "Two Courvoisier."

The waiter came with the glasses and they sat drinking the brandy, in the sunlight. Michael finished half his and drank a little water.

"I look at women," he said. "Correct. I don't say it's wrong or right, I look at them. If I pass them on the street and I don't look at them, I'm fooling you, I'm fooling myself."

"You look at them as though you want them," Frances said, playing with her brandy glass. "Every one of them."

"In a way," Michael said, speaking softly and not to his wife, "in a way that's true. I don't do anything about it, but it's true."

"I know it. That's why I feel bad."

"Another brandy," Michael called. "Waiter, two more brandies."

"Why do you hurt me?" Frances asked. "What're you doing?"

Michael sighed and closed his eyes and rubbed them gently with his fingertips. "I love the way women look. One of the things I like best about

<sup>1</sup> pretzels: crisp salty biscuits made in the shape of a knot or a stick

<sup>2</sup> Courvoisier: a very fine brand of brandy



New York is the battalions of women. When I first came to New York from Ohio that was the first thing I noticed, the million wonderful women, all over the city. I walked around with my heart in my throat."

"A kid," Frances said. "That's a kid's feeling."

"Guess again," Michael said. "Guess again. I'm older now, I'm a man getting near middle age, putting on a little fat and I still love to walk along Fifth Avenue at three o'clock on the east side of the street between Fiftieth and Fifty-seventh Streets, they're all out then, making believe they're shopping, in their furs and their crazy hats, everything all concentrated from all over the world into eight blocks, the best furs, the best clothes, the handsomest women, out to spend money and feeling good about it, looking coldly at you, making believe they're not looking at you as you go past."

The Japanese waiter put the two drinks down, smiling with great happiness.

"Everything is all right?" he asked.

"Everything is wonderful," Michael said.

"If it's just a couple of fur coats," Frances said, "and forty-five-dollar hats..."

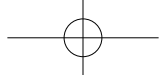
"It's not the fur coats. Or the hats. That's just the scenery for that particular kind of woman. Understand," he said, "you don't have to listen to this."

"I want to listen."

"I like the girls in the offices. Neat, with their eyeglasses, smart, chipper<sup>1</sup>, knowing what everything is about, taking care of themselves all the time." He kept his eye on the people going slowly past outside the window. "I like the girls on Forty-fourth Street at lunch time, the actresses, all dressed up on nothing a week, talking to the good-looking boys, wearing themselves out being young and vivacious outside Sardi's, waiting for producers to look at them. I like the salesgirls in Macy's<sup>2</sup>, paying attention to you first because you're a man, leaving lady customers waiting, flirting with you over socks and books and phonograph needles. I got all this stuff accumulated in me because I've been thinking about it for ten years and now you've asked for it

1 chipper: lively and cheerful

2 Macy's: the largest department store in New York City



and here it is.”

“Go ahead,” Frances said.

“When I think of New York City, I think of all the girls, the Jewish girls, the Italian girls, the Irish, Polack<sup>1</sup>, Chinese, German, Negro, Spanish, Russian girls, all on parade in the city. I don’t know whether it’s something special with me or whether every man in the city walks around with the same feeling inside him, but I feel as though I’m at a picnic in this city. I like to sit near the women in the theaters, the famous beauties who’ve taken six hours to get ready and look it. And the young girls at the football games, with the red cheeks, and when the warm weather comes, the girls in their summer dresses...” He finished his drink. “That’s the story. You asked for it, remember. I can’t help but look at them. I can’t help but want them.”

“You want them,” Frances repeated without expression. “You said that.”

“Right,” Michael said, being cruel now and not caring, because she had made him expose himself. “You brought this subject up for discussion, we will discuss it fully.”

Frances finished her drink and swallowed two or three times extra. “You say you love me?”

“I love you, but I also want them. O.K.”

“I’m pretty, too,” Frances said. “As pretty as any of them.”

“You’re beautiful,” Michael said, meaning it.

“I’m good for you,” Frances said, pleading. “I’ve made a good wife, a good housekeeper, a good friend. I’d do any damn thing for you.”

“I know,” Michael said. He put his hand out and grasped hers.

“You’d like to be free to...” Frances said.

“Sssh.”

“Tell the truth.” She took her hand away from under his.

Michael flicked the edge of his glass with his finger. “O.K.,” he said gently. “Sometimes I feel I would like to be free.”

“Well,” Frances said defiantly, drumming on the table, “anytime you say...”

“Don’t be foolish.” Michael swung his chair around to her side of the

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<sup>1</sup> Polack: a person of Polish descent

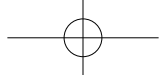


table and patted her thigh.

She began to cry, silently, into her handkerchief, bent over just enough so that nobody else in the bar would notice. "Some day," she said, crying, "you're going to make a move<sup>1</sup>..."

Michael didn't say anything. He sat watching the bartender slowly peel a lemon.

"Aren't you?" Frances asked harshly. "Come on, tell me. Talk. Aren't you?"

"Maybe," Michael said. He moved his chair back again. "How the hell do I know?"

"You know," Frances persisted. "Don't you know?"

"Yes," Michael said after a while, "I know."

Frances stopped crying then. Two or three snuffles into the handkerchief and she put it away and her face didn't tell anything to anybody. "At least do me one favor," she said.

"Sure."

"Stop talking about how pretty this woman is, or that one. Nice eyes, nice breasts, a pretty figure, good voice," she mimicked his voice. "Keep it to yourself. I'm not interested."

"Excuse me." Michael waved to the waiter. "I'll keep it to myself."

Frances flicked the corner of her eyes. "Another brandy," she told the waiter.

"Two," Michael said.

"Yes, ma'am, yes, sir," said the waiter, backing away.

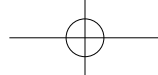
Frances regarded him coolly across the table. "Do you want me to call the Stevensons?" she asked. "It'll be nice in the country."

"Sure," Michael said. "Call them up."

She got up from the table and walked across the room toward the telephone. Michael watched her walk, thinking, what a pretty girl, what nice legs.

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<sup>1</sup> make a move: take action



### Topics for discussion

1. How is the plot structured? What are the stages of its development?
2. How would you describe the relationship between the husband and wife in the story? What is the basic conflict that develops between them?
3. How do you interpret the ending of the story? Is it appropriate to and consistent with the rest of the plot?
4. What have you learned from this story about conjugal life and life in general?