Gateman’s Gift by R.K. Narayan

In Gateman’s Gift by R.K. Narayan we have the theme of fear, paralysis, insecurity, suffering, social opinion, pride and identity. Taken from his Malgudi Days collection the story is narrated in the third person by an unnamed narrator and after reading the story the reader realises that Narayan may be exploring the theme of fear. Singh lives in fear of opening the registered letter that has been sent to him. So crippling is Singh’s fear that he believes himself to be going mad. Though the logical thing to do would be to open the letter and discover whether the letter holds good or bad news Singh isn’t able to do this. It is also interesting that Singh loses interest in his clay-modelling because of the fear he feels over the letter. This loss of interest is important as it highlights just how overpowering the fear is for Singh. It is also interesting that Singh never thinks about just getting over what may be in the letter if the contents of the letter are of a bad nature. It is as though he would rather not know whether the letter contains good or bad news. If anything there is a sense of paralysis in the story. Singh is unable to move forward as long as he leaves the letter unopened. Rather he believes himself to be going mad based solely on the opinions of others. Which may suggest that Singh may be somewhat insecure about his identity. He doesn’t appear to have the strength to trust his own mind and is swayed by social opinion.

The fact that some of Singh’s clay models are copies of his old work environment may also be important as it suggests that Singh remembers with fondness his time as a Gateman. It may also be significant that Singh fears he may have upset his old boss by bringing the models into the pension office when Singh was collecting his pension. As this suggests that Singh still respects his old boss and does not wish to upset him. Singh’s respect for his old boss is mirrored by his boss’ respect for him. Something that is noticeable when the accountant opens the letter for Singh and the reader realises that Singh’s old boss admires all his clay models. Admires them so much that he has given him an extra one hundred rupees. There is also no doubting that Singh suffers, because of his fear, throughout the story. However Singh’s wife also suffers and after the letter arrives and remains unopened she is careful. So careful that she stays out of Singh’s way.

It might also be a case that Narayan is exploring the theme of pride. Singh is proud of his job as a Gateman. While some critics might suggest that his role is at the lower end of the employment scale. Singh doesn’t look at things like that. He is happy to be able to be part of something. To have some responsibility and to get paid for it too. The village that Singh makes that reminds him of his father’s village also appears to be the one clay model that Singh is most proud of. It is as though the model of the village is part of Singh’s identity. Yet he destroys it in a moment of madness all because of his fear to open the letter. Though it is clear that Singh is not really mad he does through stress do things that would be deemed inappropriate. One of these things is the breaking of the bulb which results in Singh getting arrested. Which the reader suspects is out of character for Singh. At no other stage of the story has Singh been in trouble.

The end of the story is also interesting as Singh despite the praises of his boss, gives up making clay models. It’s difficult to say for certain as to why this might be but it is possible that Singh is equating the clay modelling to the madness he went through. However the reader is aware that the real problem for Singh was the fact that he was afraid to open the letter. Singh believes more in living a structured life than a creative one and appears to associate creativity with madness. Though some critics might suggest that there is a definable link between creativity and madness it is important to remember that prior to the letter arriving Singh was happy making clay models. If anything Singh’s life at the end of the story is still full of fear. No longer is he worried about the letter instead he is afraid to be creative despite the fact that many people have told him how good he is at clay modelling. Which suggests that the paralysis Singh felt when he first received the letter also remains. Singh may have retired from his job and is happy to collect his pension every week but he doesn’t appear to do anything else now that he has stopped clay modelling.

**The Roman Image by R.K. Narayan**

In The Roman Image by R.K. Narayan we have the theme of opportunity, fame, honesty, enthusiasm, reputation, appearance and change. Taken from his Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories collection the story is narrated in the first person by a man called the Talkative Man and after reading the story the reader realises that Narayan may be exploring the theme of opportunity. Both the narrator and the doctor are set for greatness due to their discovery of the so called roman image. However when they discover that the image is not what they expected it to be there is a sense that the narrator’s life won’t change as he would like it too. There will be no fame or recognition for the narrator despite all his efforts. This may be important as there is a sense that the narrator is driven by his desire to be famous and perhaps to make some money. If anything Narayan may be highlighting the perils of chasing an aspiration of a false opportunity. Though the doctor believes that he has done his research on the image. He still nonetheless is wrong about the image. This too could be important as Narayan may be attempting to sleight those who may deem themselves to be better than others when it comes to their particular field of interest (archaeology).

There is also no disputing that the narrator has worked hard for the doctor however due to the fact that he knows the truth about the image. It is likely that all his hard work will be in vain. Not only is he not going to be famous and receive praise from others but he is also out of a job. The doctor instructing the narrator to destroy the manuscript that he was working on. This could be important as the doctor appears to be genuinely concerned that he will be viewed upon as a fool. For devoting so much time on the project and also telling the world about the image. If anything the doctor may be concerned about his reputation and his standing in academic circles. It is for this reason that the reader suspects that the doctor wants the narrator to get rid of the image. Though both men may feel foolish the doctor is the one who will really suffer as his reputation is everything to him. He needs to be respected by others in order to progress with his work. Without a good standing among his peers the doctor knows he is nothing.

It is also interesting that the narrator is completely honest with the doctor. He could have said nothing and hoped for the best. Enjoying any fame or money that might come his way. Instead though he chose to do the right thing and tell the doctor the truth. It is also possible that should the narrator have not told the doctor the truth somebody would have eventually found out. Something that would have made matters worse for both the narrator and the doctor. In all likelihood the narrator probably had no option but to tell the truth. Even though he has exhausted his energies writing the manuscript. Both the narrator and the doctor are enthusiastic about their work which may have led to their fall from grace. The doctor in particular keen to find new discoveries that would enhance his reputation. Though there is no disputing both men are hard-working the doctor may have needed to step back and take time to reflect before he claimed the roman image to be one of the greatest discoveries he has ever made. If anything the doctor may have been blinded by his enthusiasm.

The end of the story is also interesting as rather than destroy the image the narrator throws it into the sea. Hoping that it will not be found again. This could be important as life would have been easier for the narrator if he had of destroyed the image. As it is the image is open to be found again and may be traceable back to both the narrator and the doctor. If this is the case that the truth will come out and others will realises that the doctor has made a mistake. No matter how great others think of him or how great he thinks about himself. He has made a mistake. A mistake that has the possibility of coming back to haunt the doctor and the narrator. It would have been easier to destroy the image and put the matter to rest. Though the doctor may not have been thinking clearly. Still stunned at his mistake the most important thing for the doctor is the continuation of his good name. His name is his trade whereas the narrator only had the good fortune to dream for a short period of time about what might be before reality set in. For a brief moment the narrator believed that the roman image would change his life. That was till he heard the truth about the image, the real truth.

**The Rajah’s Diamond by R.L.STEVENSON**

The Rajah’s Diamond, the most precious diamond in the world, seems to bring bad luck on everyone who comes into contact with it. Owned by Sir Thomas Vandeleur, his wife tries to sell it to pay her debts. But the diamond is stolen and then falls into the hands of various people who are all corrupted by its great beauty and value. Follow the diamond as it travels from London to Edinburgh to Paris and find out what happens to it.

The Rajah’s diamond is also recognisable as a fictional cousin to both the famous Indian diamond the [Koh-i-Noor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koh-i-Noor), which was presented to Queen Victoria by the last Maharaja of the Sikh Empire in 1850; and the [Hope diamond](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hope_Diamond), which like the Rajah’s diamond was stolen (from the Garde Meuble during the French Revolution) and, unlike it, successfully cut. Yet Stevenson’s story predates the first newspaper accounts of the legendary curses which were attributed to the Hope diamond by at least a decade.

As we shall see, it is unclear whether Florizel’s fixation with the diamond’s demonic lustre is held sincerely or assumed cynically. The Prince may be too sweet-natured to attribute evil to the human beings who covet the diamond, and so he resorts to ascribing sinister powers to the jewel itself. This stance has, however, the ultimate advantage for Florizel of justifying his various paternalistic interventions. He alone, it seems, possesses the wisdom and authority to save all of humanity from the diamond.

There is no qualitative difference between the fortunes bestowed by the Prince and the diamond. The latter advances General Vandeleur “from an obscure and unpopular soldier into one of the lions of London society,” whilst Francis Scrymgeour will experience a similar transformation at the Prince’s hands. Whilst both the Prince and the diamond can make men’s fortunes, a survey of the young men who we meet throughout this story suggests that Florizel’s moral authority is just as mythical as the diamond’s corrupting powers.

The first temporary-central character, Harry Hartley, may be the simplest from the series, but he is paradoxically the most subversive. We may assume that he is too pathetic to ever feasibly come to the Prince’s attention, but the diamond itself, despite being mentioned, also fails to make an appearance during his adventure. We see only the “bandbox” which contains it (it effectively arrives wrapped), whilst the corrupting powers which Florizel attributes to the diamond are instead manifested in the person of the young secretary. A succession of shrewd and roguish females are enchanted by Hartley’s good looks: Lady Vandeleur declares him “positively too pretty to be unattached,” and she will later entrust her entire fortune to this bimbo. Hartley charms every maid he meets into helping him and when he is caught with his mistress’s jewels by an unscrupulous gardener, his bonny looks will once again save him.

The gardener comments sarcastically upon Hartley’s “trim” and “finery” and calls him “my little man,” only to be rewarded with a “great treasure of diamonds.” This is a topsy-turvy rendition of the folk scenario in which the peasant chances upon a fairy (it was over a decade until the term “fairy” would first refer to homosexuals), but the traditional terms of the bargain are reversed. It is now down to the peasant to grant the fortune. The gardener is amazed by his own generosity: “I could pocket the whole of these pretty pebbles, if I choose, and I should like to see you dare to say a word; but I think I must have taken a liking to you…”

This perfectly needless generosity represents the very opposite of the “crimes and treacheries” which Florizel will later credit to the Rajah’s diamond. Yet the diamond does not in fact count amongst the nurseryman’s hoard. Bizarrely, despite its oft proclaimed size, it has been overlooked and “trodden heavily underfoot.” Such a treatment of the diamond is further reflected in Lady Vandeleur’s retort that she would not marry her husband again had he “a diamond bigger than your head.” These are not the words of somebody who has been corrupted by a diamond’s enchantments; they instead reflect the commonsensical wisdom that great riches are usually more trouble than they are worth. She grows similarly disenchanted with her secretary.

The Vandeleurs are neither a permanent family nor anything other than temporary custodians of both the diamond and the equally bewitching Hartley. He may let them down, but Lady Vandeleur is compelled to rely upon him in the first place because he is the closest thing that her marriage has produced to a son. The biographical reading here proceeds with its customary if objectionable fluency, so that the Vandeleurs come to afford an outrageous caricature of the family from which Stevenson had felt increasingly exiled. Significantly, however, Hartley will never meet Florizel, the ultimate paternalist, and he will achieve “a new and manlier life” without the Prince’s patronage.

If only a plane of symbolism, the Prince’s fellow patriarch General Vandeleur interacts with Hartley in his stead, but the General will be reduced to a forlorn and impotent figure. It is a Bohemian revolution in microcosm. The General cannot make Hartley’s fortune because he loses his own (with Hartley’s help), whilst the secretary will inherit a tidy sum from a “maiden aunt in Worcester,” which frees him to pursue a new life in the tropics. Although Hartley may seem an unlikely figure to clothe in Stevenson’s own fantasies, the author had coveted the freedom which Hartley procures and he would also emigrate to warmer climes once he had obtained it.

Florizel’s misanthropic assumptions are once again disqualified, albeit temporarily, when the diamond inspires the same provisional solidarity between Reverend Rolles and the “Dictator” Jack Vandeleur as we had witnessed previously between the secretary and the gardener. There is no doubt some distant rebuke to Thomas Stevenson in the fact that Rolles is hindered as an adventurer by his priestly education and underdeveloped romantic flair. Once his hands are on the diamond, Rolles appeals to the “Fathers of the Church” for help and finds them “conspicuously ignorant of life.”

Although Rolles concedes of Florizel that “there was something in his air which seemed to invite confidence and to expect submission,” his crowning mistake is to appeal to the wrong patriarch: the brother of General Vandeleur and former “Dictator of Paraguay,” Jack Vandeleur. Paraguay had only ever actually had one “[Dictator](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jos%C3%A9_Gaspar_Rodr%C3%ADguez_de_Francia),” and he, José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, was of indigenous stock; whilst Vandeleur is an Irish name of Dutch origin. Stevenson may have regarded Paraguayan dictatorship as the epitome of the modern, since Francia was a disciple of Rousseau and his regime was utopian in ambition and authoritarian in practice, at one point nationalising the Catholic Church.

Like the now-deceased President of the Suicide Club, Jack Vandeleur provides an antithesis to Florizel’s feudal glamour. Whilst the Prince talks beautifully about everything in the newspapers, the Dictator has got his hands dirty committing real “exploits and atrocities.” Rolles is dazzled by the contrast between “the man who spoke boldly of his own deeds and perils, or the man who seemed, like a god, to know all things and to have suffered nothing.”

Rolles will presume to approach Jack Vandeleur as an equal, but Francis Scrymgeour does not even know the identity of this benefactor. He instead accepts the principle alone of patriarchy. “Scrymgeour” was the name of an old Fife family, and earlier Scrymgeours had ridden in the armies of William Wallace and Robert the Bruce. It is curious to note in light of Stevenson’s Unionist sympathies that his own Scrymgeour abandons his baldly Scottish name and family history after entering into an apparently advantageous contract (“Scrymgeour” may sound like “scrounger” to modern ears, but [this word](https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?year_start=1800&year_end=2008&corpus=15&smoothing=7&case_insensitive=on&content=scrounger&direct_url=t4%3B%2Cscrounger%3B%2Cc0%3B%2Cs0%3B%3Bscrounger%3B%2Cc0%3B%3BScrounger%3B%2Cc0) was not yet in circulation). After a lawyer mentions in passing that the elder Scrymgeour “is not your father,” Scrymgeour discovers “in his heart an invincible repugnance to the name of Scrymgeour, which he had never hitherto disliked… he observed little defects of manner in his adoptive father which filled him with surprise and almost with disgust.”

In assuming that a father will settle his destiny for him, Scrymgeour reduces himself to a child: “Father!.. I will obey you with my life; treat me as a son, and you will find I have a son’s devotion.” The consequent humiliation is awesome. Vandeleur pronounces that, “You are no son of mine. You are my brother’s bastard by a fishwife, if you want to know,” and for a second time Scrymgeour’s ancestry has been dashed with a few choice, casual words.

Both Hartley and Scrymgeour attach themselves to the Vandeleur family and both find themselves on the receiving end of a Vandeleur brother’s scorn. Yet the General conceivably sues for a reconciliation with his illegitimate son after the calamitous substitute, Hartley, has alerted him to what he has lost and what he is missing. Such is the importance of paternity that amidst all of the drama, news of Scrymgeour’s long lost mother, the unnamed “fishwife,” is automatically forgotten. Happily, the equally nameless Miss Vandeleur (even her father calls her this) steps forward to volunteer a mother’s warmth and sympathy.

Miss Vandeleur’s treatment of the diamond as a mere “keepsake” may be as brutal as striking a knife to her father’s heart, or else she is unconcerned with its value and her spontaneous generosity represents a further example of the diamond’s failure to exert its supposedly sinister influence. Nonetheless, even as his daughter and nephew are united in open rebellion, Jack Vandeleuer grieves for the loss of his diamond rather than his family, “roaring between grief and rage, like a lioness robbed of her whelps.”

Just as Colonel Geraldine had fleetingly restaged a production of the Suicide Club when seeking seconds for Florizel’s duel, Scrymgeour will re-enact Hartley’s flight from his substitute father (and his own genuine father). The role of Mrs Vandeleur is assumed by Miss Vandeleur; the streets of London are replaced by those of Paris. In both pursuits, neither Harry nor Francis knows that they are carrying the diamond.

The Prince’s intervention at the end of the story may restore Scrymgeour’s faith in benevolent patronage, but when Scrymgeour tells the Prince that, “I know not who you are, but I believe you to be worthy of confidence and helpful,” he is replicating Rolles’ disastrous approach to the erstwhile Dictator of Paraguay. Unlike Vandeleur, who initially accepts Rolles as an equal, the Prince simply commands, “give me the diamond” and the casket is “handed over.” The Prince rustles up a marriage and fortune for Scrymgeour so effortlessly that one may overlook the reality that, with a bit of initiative, Scrymgeour could have achieved the same for himself without surrendering the jewel.

Rolles may be right to lament that he has “neither the virtues of a priest nor the dexterity of a rogue,” but he seriously needs to cultivate either priestly wisdom or roguish cynicism if he is regarding the conceited Florizel as Christ. He pleads to Florizel “suffer me to touch your hand,” but the snobbish reply is noli me tangere. Florizel advises Rolles to “go to Australia as a colonist, seek menial labour in the open air, and try to forget that you have ever been a clergyman, or that you ever set eyes on that accursed stone.”

Accepting comparable freedoms to Hartley may be wiser than yielding to the Prince’s patronage, but Rolles is back at his original stance betwixt knavery and virtue. There is no reason why he should exchange his priestly ways for the Australian outback, and it is not clear why he is listening to the Prince’s advice in the first place, since they are both alike in pocketing the stolen diamond.

If Florizel believes that the diamond exerts a destabilising influence over human affairs, it is perhaps significant that he ends up conflating it with himself. “Do not provoke me,” he snarls at Jack Vandeleur, “or you may find me harder than you dream.” Petulant, but with his shine fading, he rails at Rolles that, “I have not yet sat down… you have treated your superior in station with discourtesy.” This bluster will not work, however, with the nameless “detective” who is waiting for Florizel at the end of the story. Wooing the detective with the sudden notion that they are equals, Florizel volunteers that “I had rather, strange as you may think it, be a detective of character and parts than a weak and ignoble sovereign.” Since the story had previously described “the detective that there is in all of us,” and detection is intrinsically more egalitarian than princely power, in being based on the universal faculty of reason rather than privilege, Florizel has essentially agreed to an existential demotion.

For a head of state to be apprehended with a stolen diamond would presumably rock the politics of Europe. The Prince’s hammy overture to the diamond’s “worms of death” may be heartfelt, but it also saves his own skin. Once the jewel is safely at the bottom of the Seine, Florizel can proceed to bribe and bully the awaiting Prefect, who probably has a price.

Florizel’s story about an Indian officer who was corrupted by the diamond is no doubt pure fiction – another Arabian Night within an Arabian Night. Yet if the Prince relates how this figure “betrayed a body of his fellow-soldiers, and suffered them to be defeated and massacred by thousands,” the same fate conceivably awaits the Prince’s supporters once he is given the boot in Bohemia.

Florizel is now keeping “a cigar store in Rupert Street” but it would strain even Stevenson’s storytelling powers to describe his wise and admirable conduct whilst he was being toppled by revolutionaries. Although a revolution may be the ultimate destination for Stevenson’s dismissal of paternalism, a Tory such as Stevenson was never likely to endorse any sort of revolution. He simply allows the romance to disintegrate like cigar smoke. We are left with a picture of the credulous narrator listening to a tobacconist’s account of how he used to be a Bohemian potentate. Alas, as a Habsburg [dependency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohemia#Habsburg_Monarchy), Bohemia never had a successful revolution.

**THE PERFORMING CHILD BY R.K.NARAYAN**

**Malgudi Days**- a fictitious small town in south India is typical of any small town or village, habituated by timeless characters who could be living anywhere in the world. They are simple folk, dealing with their lives in an uniquely engaging, humorous and humane manner. Famous Indian novelist R.K Narayan, drew on his observance of human life to create the magic of **Malgudi Days**. **Malgudi days** Synopsis: A little girl's performance is watched by a film producer and director who come in search of the girl who is asked to be brought to studio for the screen test. The girl fearing this hides herself as the time nears for her to go to the studio The parents who start searching fo their daughter are worried about her disappearance. Ultimately the mother realizes that the girl has hidden herself in a basket and fainted and when she comes to her senses and pleads with the mother not to send her to acting, she concedes to her demand.

**A Living God By Lafcadio Hearn**

From immemorial time the shores of Japan have been swept, at irregular intervals of centuries, by enormous tidal waves, tidal waves caused by earthquakes or by submarine volcanic action. These awful sudden risings of the sea are called by the Japanese “tsunami.” On the evening of June 17, 1896, a wave nearly two hundred miles long struck the northeastern provinces of Miyagi, Iwate, and Aomori, wrecking scores of towns and villages, ruining whole districts, and destroying nearly thirty thousand human lives.

 The story of Hamaguchi Gohei is the story of a like calamity which happened long before the era of Meiji, on another part of the Japanese coast. He was an old man at the time of the occurrence that made him famous. He was the most influential resident of the village to which he belonged: he had been for many years its muraosa, or headman; and he was not less liked than respected. The people usually called him Ojiisan, which means Grandfather; but, being the richest member of the community, he was sometimes officially referred to as the Choja. He used to advise the smaller farmers about their interests, to arbitrate their disputes, to advance them money at need, and to dispose of their rice for them on the best terms possible. Hamaguchi's big thatched farmhouse stood at the verge of a small plateau overlooking a bay.

 The plateau, mostly devoted to rice culture, was hemmed in on three sides by thickly wooded summits. From its outer verge the land sloped down in a huge green concavity, as if scooped out, to the edge of the water; and the whole of this slope, some three quarters of a mile long, was so terraced as to look, when viewed from the open sea, like an enormous flight of green steps, divided in the centre by a narrow white zigzag, a streak of mountain road. Ninety thatched dwellings and a Shinto temple, composing the village proper, stood along the curve of the bay; and other houses climbed straggling up the slope for some distance on either side of the narrow road leading to the Choja's home. One autumn evening Hamaguchi Gohei was looking down from the balcony of his house at some preparations for a merry-making in the village below.

There had been a very fine ricecrop, and the peasants were going to celebrate their harvest by a dance in the court of the ujigami. The old man could see the festival banners (nobori) fluttering above the roofs of the solitary street, the strings of paper lanterns festooned between bamboo poles, the decorations of the shrine, and the brightly colored gathering of the young people. He had nobody with him that evening but his little grandson, a lad of ten; the rest of the household having gone early to the village. He would have accompanied them had he not been feeling less strong than usual. The day had been oppressive; and in spite of a rising breeze, there was still in the air that sort of heavy heat which, according to the experience of the Japanese peasant, at certain seasons precedes an earthquake. And presently an earthquake came.

It was not strong enough to frighten anybody; but Hamaguchi, who had felt hundreds of shocks in his time, thought it queer; a long, slow, spongy motion. Probably it was but the after-tremor of some immense seismic action very far away. The house crackled and rocked gently several times; then all became still again. As the quaking ceased Hamaguchi's keen old eyes were anxiously turned toward the village. It often happens that the attention of a person gazing fixedly at a particular spot or object is suddenly diverted by the sense of something not knowingly seen at all, by a mere vague feeling of the unfamiliar in that dim outer circle of unconscious perception which lies beyond the field of clear vision.

 Thus it chanced that Hamaguchi became aware of something unusual in the offing. He rose to his feet, and looked at the sea. It had darkened quite suddenly, and it was acting strangely. It seemed to be moving against the wind. It was running away from the land. Within a very little time the whole village had noticed the phenomenon. Apparently no one had felt the previous motion of the ground, but all were evidently astounded by the movement of the water. They were running to the beach, and even beyond the beach, to watch it. No such ebb had been witnessed on that coast within the memory of living man. Things never seen before were making apparition; unfamiliar spaces of ribbed sand and reaches of weedhung rock were left bare even as Hamaguchi gazed. And none of the people below appeared to guess what that monstrous ebb signified.

Hamaguchi Gohei himself had never seen such a thing before; but he remembered things told him in his childhood by his father's father, and he knew all the traditions of the coast. He understood what the sea was going to do. Perhaps he thought of the time needed to send a message to the village, or to get the priests of the Buddhist temple on the hill to sound their big bell… But it would take very much longer to tell what he might have thought than it took him to think. He simply called to his grandson: " Tada ! quick, very quick!... Light me a torch." Taimatsu, or pine-torches, are kept in many coast dwellings for use on stormy nights, and also for use at certain Shinto festivals.

The child kindled a torch at once; and the old man hurried with it to the fields, where hundreds of rice-stacks, representing most of his invested capital, stood awaiting transportation. Approaching those nearest the verge of the slope, he began to apply the torch to them, hurrying from one to another as quickly as his aged limbs could carry him. The sun-dried stalks caught like tinder; the strengthening sea breeze blew the blaze landward and presently, rank behind rank, the stacks burst into flame, sending skyward columns of smoke that met and mingled into one enormous cloudy whirl. Tada, astonished and terrified, ran after his grandfather, crying, "Ojiisan! Why? Ojiisan! Why?"

But Hamaguchi did not answer: he had no time to explain; he was thinking only of the four hundred lives in peril. For awhile the child stared wildly at the blazing rice; then burst into tears, and ran back to the house, feeling sure that his grandfather had gone mad. Hamaguchi went on firing stack after stack, till he had reached the limit of his field; then he threw down his torch, and waited. The acolyte of the hill-temple, observing the blaze, set the big bell booming; and the people responded to the double appeal. Hamaguchi watched them hurrying in from the sands and over the beach and up from the village, like a swarming of ants, and, his anxious eyes, scarcely faster; for the moments seemed terribly long to him.

The sun was going down; the wrinkled bed of the bay, and a vast sallow speckled expanse beyond it, lay naked to the last orange glow; and still the sea was fleeing toward the horizon. Really, however, Hamaguchi did not have very long to wait before the first party of succor arrived, a score of agile young peasants, who wanted to attack the fire at once. But the Choja, holding out both arms, stopped them. "Let it burn, lads!" he commanded, "Let it be! I want the whole mura here. There is a great danger, taihen da!" The whole village was coming; and Hamaguchi counted.

All the young men and boys were soon on the spot, and not a few of the more active women and girls; then came most of the older folk, and mothers with babies at their backs, and even children, for children could help to pass water; and the elders too feeble to keep up with the first rush could be seen well on their way up the steep ascent. The growing multitude, still knowing nothing, looked alternately, in sorrowful wonder, at the flaming fields and at the impassive face of their Choja. And the sun went down. "Grandfather is mad, I am afraid of him!" sobbed Tada, in answer to a number of questions. "He is mad. He set fire to the rice on purpose. I saw him do it!" "As for the rice," cried Hamaguchi, "the child tells the truth. I set fire to the rice… Are all the people here?" The Kumi-cho and the heads of families looked about them, and down the hill, and made reply: "All are here, or very soon will be…

We cannot understand this thing." "Kita!" shouted the old man at the top of his voice, pointing to the open. "Say now if I be mad!" Through the twilight eastward all looked, and saw at the edge of the dusky horizon a long, lean, dim line like the shadowing of a coast where no coast ever was, a line that thickened as they gazed, that broadened as a coast-line broadens to the eyes of one approaching it, yet incomparably more quickly. For that long darkness was the returning sea, towering like a cliff, and coursing more swiftly than the kite flies.

"Tsunami!" shrieked the people; and then all shrieks and all sounds and all power to hear sounds were annihilated by a nameless shock heavier than any thunder, as the colossal swell smote the shore with a weight that sent a shudder through all the hills, and a foam-burst like a blaze of sheet-lightning. Then for an instant nothing was visible but a storm of spray rushing up the slope like a cloud; and the people scattered back in panic from the mere menace of it. When they looked again, they saw a white horror of sea raving over the place of their homes. It drew back roaring, and tearing out the bowels of the land as it went.

Twice, thrice, five times the sea struck and ebbed, but each time with lesser surges; then it returned to its ancient bed and stayed, still raging, as after a typhoon. On the plateau for a time there was no word spoken. All stared speechlessly at the desolation beneath, the ghastliness of hurled rock and naked riven cliff, the bewilderment of scooped-up deep-sea wrack and shingle shot over the empty site of dwelling and temple. The village was not; the greater part of the fields were not; even the terraces had ceased to exist; and of all the homes that had been about the bay there remained nothing recognizable except two straw roofs tossing, madly in the offing.

The after-terror of the death escaped and the stupefaction of the general loss kept all lips dumb, until the voice of Hamaguchi was heard again, observing gently, "That was why I set fire to the rice." He, their Choja, now stood among them almost as poor as the poorest; for his wealth was gone but he had saved four hundred lives by the sacrifice. Little Tada ran to him, and caught his hand, and asked forgiveness for having said naughty things. Whereupon the people woke up to the knowledge of why they were alive, and began to wonder at the simple, unselfish foresight that had saved them; and the headmen prostrated themselves in the dust before Hamaguchi Gohei, and the people after them.

 Then the old man wept a little, partly because he was happy, and partly because he was aged and weak and had been sorely tried. "My house remains," he said, as soon as he could find words, automatically caressing Tada's brown cheeks; "and there is room for many. Also the temple on the hill stands; and there is shelter there for the others." Then he led the way to his house; and the people cried and shouted. The period of distress was long, because in those days there were no means of quick communication between district and district, and the help needed had to be sent from far away. But when better times came, the people did not forget their debt to Hamaguchi Gohei.

They could not make him rich; nor would he have suffered them to do so, even had it been possible. Moreover, gifts would never have sufficed as an expression of their reverential feeling towards him; for they believed that the ghost within him was divine. So they declared him a god, and thereafter called him Hamaguchi Daimyojin, thinking they could give him no greater honor; and truly no greater honor in any country could be given to mortal man. And when they rebuilt the village, they built a temple to the spirit of him, and fixed above the front of it a tablet bearing his name in Chinese text of gold; and they worshiped him there, with prayer and with offerings.

How he felt about it I cannot say; I know only that he continued to live in his old thatched home upon the hill, with his children and his children's children, just as humanly and simply as before, while his soul was being worshiped in the shrine below. A hundred years and more he has been dead; but his temple, they tell me, still stands, and the people still pray to the ghost of the good old farmer to help them in time of fear or trouble.

**A Snake in The Grass by R.K.Narayan**

One afternoon the members of a family were taking rest inside the hosue. A cyclist rang the bell of his cycle and announced that he had seen a snake entering the compound of the house. Making announcement, he followed his way.

The family consisting of the mother and her four sons assembled at the gate after listening it. They found their old servant Dasa sleeping in the shed. They woke him up and made him known about the entry of the snake in the compound of their bunglow. The servant tried to ignore the matter. They forced him to search the cobra. They threatened him to dismiss if he failed to trace the snake out. Some neighbours, too gathered there and charged the servant with being lazy. The servant defended himself saying his regular demand of a grass-cutter machine. They talked over it and its price for a while. In the meantime, a college-boy of the family came in. He read out the statical data, he had collected about the death of people due to snake-biting.

The boys of the family brought in bamboo-sticks and pressed one into the hands of the servant also. They worked with creepers, bushes and everything in the garden but they could not find the snake. When there was nothing more he done, the servant asked triumphantly where the snake was.

In the meantime, an old she-beggar cried at the gate for alms. They asked her not to disturb as they wee hunting a snake. Hearing this, the old woman announced it to be G Subramanya ang forbade its killing. Mother agreed to her statement remembering her promised ‘Abhishekam’. She gave a coin to the old woman.

Shortly an old man appeared at the gate and announced himself as a snake-charmer. They gathered around him. He narrated the story of his victories over snakes. They asked him to catch the cobra but helplessly, he said to them that he could do nothing unless they show him where the cobra was. He gave them his name and address and asked to call him if they saw the snake.

Shortly an old man appeared at the gate and announced himself as a snake-charmer. They gathered around him. He narrated the story of his victories over snakes. They asked him to catch the cobra but helplessly, he said to them that he could do nothing unless they show him where the cobra was. He gave them his name and address and asked to call him if they saw the snake.

At five in the evening, they threw sticks and started talking about their strategy to meet the critical situation. In the meantime the old servant appeared with a pot in his hand and declared that he caught the snake. The servant bragged about his bravery and asked them not to blame him calling a dull and idle. He talked to hand over the snake to the snake-charmer who was living nearby. The mother appreciated him and he went away.

It was five minutes since Dasa had gone when the youngest son cried, “See there ! a cobra came out of a hole in the compound” It paused for a moment to look at the gathering and then crawled under the gate and disappeared along a drain. A mystery remained whether there were two snakes there or not. If not, what was in the pot, the servant had gone out with. Had they checked the pot, it would have been cleared.

**"My Lost Dollar", by Stephen Leacock**

"My Lost Dollar " is a story narrated in first person by the author Stephen Leacock.   The one line summary is that he tries in many ways to get back that one dollar he lent his friend Todd for paying his taxi to go to Bermuda.   It is made to be funny by using exaggeration on the amount one dollar and on friendship.   There is humour made out in the efforts of the author, all efforts going in vain.  The author picked a tale of two friends who are found in common place.

      The author lends one dollar to Todd in the name of friendship and in kind.  After Todd goes to Bermuda, he had not forgotten about it.  He expected Todd to return it as soon as he could.  But Todd avoids it as if he had forgotten it.  After some days, Stephen gets a letter from Todd.  He mentioned the temperature in Bermuda but not about the dollar.

     When Todd returns to the town after three weeks and then Stephen meets Tedd at the railway station.  The author does not explicitly ask for the dollar.   Instead he puts in a word that they hire one taxi to go to Montreal.  Stephen said that to remind Todd about one dollar he paid for taxi ride to Bermuda.  Todd does not agree and then suggests that they walk.  So he did not get the hint of the author.

    The entire evening they spent talking about Bermuda.  All that while Stephen expected Todd to remember the one dollar that he owed him.  But he did not explicitly mention that.  Perhaps it was the embarrassement in asking directly.  It could be that in friendship one should not explicitly ask money lent to friends and that too small amount like a dollar.   Perhaps it is a shame to ask directly.

     Then he inquires about the currency in Bermuda and its value as compared to the American Dollar.  He expected that Todd would remember that one dollar.  Todd seemed to have forgotten about that dollar completely.  At dinner later, Todd says causually that Poland does not per her debts.

    Finally Stephen gives up the dollar from Tedd.  He adds the name of Tedd to the list of people owing him one dollar and have forgotten about it.   Also, he gets a thought that just as Todd has forgotten to return one dollar, perhaps he himself also forgotten to  return money he borrowed from others.  He does not remember any names.  He wishes to start a Honesty Movement for paying those the odd dollars (small amounts) that he borrowed earlier.  Honesty is important.   The author leaves a final comment in humour that he did not want Todd to see the copy of the book with this story and read this story.

    The moral of the story is that small or big, one should return the money owed to others.  That amount may be important for the lender.   Further, it gives a great pain to the lender, if the borrower totally forgets about money borrowed.  An honest man remembers the help done by friends.

**'All Avoidable Talk' BY R.K.Narayan**

The story 'All Avoidable Talk' is an interesting , humourous piece about belief in predictions . Sastri had been warned by his friend to 'avoid all avoidable talk' for a day . The stars were out to trouble him, and even the mildest of his remarks was likely to offend and lead to a quarrel. The planets were set against him and this terrified him beyond all description . Sastri took his friend's advice so seriously that he refused to converse with anyone . Neither did he scold his children for their misdeeds nor did he lose his temper at the tram conductor . Sastri worked in a jewellery shop . He had worked in this shop for twenty years . On arriving late for work , he was scolded by his master , but sastri kept his cool and did not react . As the day progressed , a coustomer came to sastri and enquired if the diamond jewellery could be set in platinum . Sastri said that he didn't know whether it could be done . This angered the coustomer , who in turn reported the matter to the master . Sastri was reprimanded by his master for his poor customer service . By the end of the day , ASastri was so upset with the day's proceedings , that he decided to resign from his job , come what may. By a strange turn of events , he changes his mind .
Sastri went to his master's house to let him know that he was fed up with the job and that he wished to resign . But before he could speak , his master pardoned him for his misbehaviour at the shop as he felt sastri had come to apologize for his misconduct . Hence , sastri managed to save his skin and felt he had triumphed over his stars that day.

**Two Gentlemen of Verona by A.J.CRONIN**

The narrator is driving through the foothills of the Alps along with his companion. While driving on the outskirts of Verona, two young boys who sell wild strawberries stop their car. The small boys appear to be quite shabby and the driver is not keen on buying strawberries from them. Then the narrator’s companion gets to know that the boys are brothers. The elder one aged 13 is Nicola, and the younger brother, aged 12, is Jacopo. The narrator and his companion buy the biggest basket of strawberries from the boys and go towards the city. The next morning, they again see the same two boys doing the shoe shining [job](https://www.toppr.com/bytes/govt-bank-jobs/) and on being asked, they say that they do many things for a living. They also tell the narrator and his companion that they could work as guides and show the visitors places of interest in the town. So, the narrator asks them to take them to Juliet’s tomb. During the time of their stay in the town, the two young boys turn out to be very helpful to the visitors.

Then, the boys are found with a bundle of unsold newspapers and are ready to sell them when the last bus arrived one night. The narrator then talks to them and asks them why they are working so hard. He also told them that they seem to fetch sufficient money, so why were they not spending anything on clothes and food. Nicola tells him that they had something in their minds but he does not elaborate.

Jacopo then requests the narrator to drop them in his car to the village polenta that is around 30 kilometers away. He requests him and says that it would be a great favor. Although, Nicola does not like the fact that his brother is troubling the narrator. But the narrator gladly agrees to help the boys with reaching that place. So, the next afternoon, he along with his companion drives to the village. After dropping them, the small boys enter a large red-roofed villa, which is actually a [hospital](https://www.toppr.com/bytes/life-of-a-doctor/).

The narrator hesitates to enter the hospital room. He tries to find out from the nurse about the girl in the hospital and the boys. Later, the nurse tells him that Lucia is the sister of these two boys and is suffering from tuberculosis. She also mentions that a bomb destroyed their home during the war. And even their father, a widower, had got killed during the early part of the war. When he died, his three children were left to starve. She told the narrator that the boys also started hating the Germans who came to rule the city and even became a part of the resistance movement. Once the war was over, Lucia got afflicted with tuberculosis and the boys had to admit her to the hospital. So, they have been trying their best to make the payments regularly to the hospital.

The narrator waited outside the room. He did not say anything to the boys on their way back in order to give the impression that they did not know about their secret.

**Analysis**

J. Cronin wrote this memoir after visiting Verona. As discussed earlier, the novel’s name is inspired by a popular Shakespeare’s play. Nevertheless, the main idea of the author is to underline the virtues that make a man a man. The story captures the sentiment that true humanity is not about letting go, and it is about courage and determination. The two young gentlemen of Verona face their difficulties head on without a single complaint. Their love and emotional strength are truly commendable. And the boys’ maturity and sense of responsibility are also praiseworthy. These boys display exemplary courage amidst extreme poverty and devastation and the author manages to find real inspiration from their lives.

**Two Gentlemen of Verona: Characters**

**The Boys:**The two ‘gentlemen’ of Verona are the boys in the story, Nicola and Jacopo. Nicola, aged 13, is the elder brother of Jacopo aged 12. Both the siblings are very sincere and self-sacrificing. They are prepared to do anything for helping their sister Lucia to recover from tuberculosis. They live a hard life and do all sorts of odd jobs. Right from shining shoes, selling fruit, distributing newspapers, to working as tourist guides and running their errands, they still look contented and maintain their self-respect. They don’t have the intention of talking about their [family](https://www.toppr.com/bytes/boron-family/) problem and want to keep it a secret. During the war period, they start hating Germans and also join the resistance movement for their country’s freedom.

**The Narrator:**the narrator of the story is a sensitive, kind and helpful person. Even after his driver’s warning, he lands up buying strawberries from the boys to help them. He notices the honesty and sincerity of the shabbily dressed and nearly-starved boys. He also drops the boys to the hospital where their sister is admitted. He also decides to not reveal to the boys that he knows about their family crisis.