**Twisted Tales**

1. *Tell-Tale Heart*, by Edgar Allan Poe (1843)
2. *The Story of an Hour*, by Kate Chopin (1894)
3. *After Twenty Years*, by O Henry (1906)
4. *Ruthless*, by William De Mille (1945)
5. *Charles*, by Shirley Jackson (1948)
6. *Lamb to the Slaughter*, by Roald Dahl (1953)
7. *Examination Day*, by Henry Slesar (1958)
8. *He-y, Come On Ou-t!*, by Shinichi Hoshi (1971)

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| A grey and white drawing of a heart  Description automatically generated | A clock with a purple hand  Description automatically generated | A wanted card with a person's face  Description automatically generated | A bottle and a boat  Description automatically generated | A yellow building with a clock on top  Description automatically generated | A cartoon of a chicken leg  Description automatically generated |  |  |

Plot twists are narrative devices that introduce unexpected and significant developments in a story, often by altering the direction or meaning of the plot. While many stories, both in literature and other forms of storytelling, share common elements, plot twists plot twists intentionally disrupt reader expectations.

1. **How does the plot twist change the direction of the narrative?**
2. **What clues are given before the plot twist is revealed?**
3. **How does the plot twist influence the development of the characters?**
4. **To what extent does the plot twist introduce moral or ethical dilemmas?**
5. **To what extent does the plot twist reflect concerns of the time?**

A dotted line with a plane flying

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| **A** | **Tell-Tale Heart**  Edgar Allan Poe (1843) | A grey and white drawing of a heart  Description automatically generated |
| 5  10  15  20  25  30  35  40  45  50  55  60  65  70  75  80  85  90  95  100 | True! – nervous – very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses – not destroyed – not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily – how calmly I can tell you the whole story.  It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture – a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees – very gradually – I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.  Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded – with what caution – with what foresight – with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it – oh, so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly – very, very slowly – so that I might not disturb the old man’s sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! Would a madman have been so wise as this? And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously – oh, so cautiously – cautiously (for the hinges creaked) – I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did for seven long nights – every night just at midnight – but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.  Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch’s minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night had I felt the extent of my own powers – of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me; for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back – but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness (for the shutters were close fastened through fear of robbers) and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.  I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in the bed, crying out – ‘Who’s there?’ I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime, I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening – just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.  Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief – oh, no! – it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless but could not. He had been saying to himself – ‘It is nothing but the wind in the chimney or it is only a mouse crossing the floor,’ or ‘it is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp.’ Yes, he has been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain. All in vain; because Death, in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel – although he neither saw nor heard – to feel the presence of my head within the room.  When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little – a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it – you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily – until, at length a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell upon the vulture eye.  It was open – wide, wide open – and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness – all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man’s face or person: for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.  And now have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over acuteness of the senses? Now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man’s heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.  But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man’s terror must have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment! – do you mark me well? I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained and stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me – the sound would be heard by a neighbour! The old man’s hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once – once only. In an instant, I dragged him to the floor and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.  If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs. I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye – not even his – could have detected anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out – no stain of any kind – no bloodspot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all – ha! ha! When I had made an end of these labours, it was four o ‘clock – still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart, for what had I now to fear? There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbour during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.  I smiled – for what had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I bade them search – search well. I led them, at length, to his chamber. I showed them his treasures, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them here to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.  The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct – it continued and became more distinct – I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling – but it continued and gained definitiveness – until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears.  No doubt I now grew very pale – but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased – and what could I do? It was a low, dull, quick sound – much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I gasped for breath – and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly – more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why would they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men – but the noise steadily increased. Oh God! what could I do? I foamed – I raved – I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder – louder – louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! – no, no! They heard! – they suspected! – they knew! – they were making a mockery of my horror! – this I thought and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! – and now – again! – hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!  ‘Villains!’ I shrieked, ‘dissemble no more! I admit the deed! – tear up the planks! – here, here! – it is the beating of his hideous heart!’ | |



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| **B** | **The Story of an Hour**  Kate Chopin (1894) | | A clock with a purple hand  Description automatically generated |
| 5  10  15  20  25  30  35  40  45 | 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 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 paralysed 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. 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 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 colour that filled the air.  Now her chest rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognise 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 or 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 with love upon her, fixed and grey 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 hers 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 the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognised 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 gripsack 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.  When the doctors came, they said she had died of heart disease – of the joy that kills. | | |
| **C** | **After Twenty Years**  O Henry (1906) | A wanted card with a person's face  Description automatically generated | |
| 5  10  15  20  25  30  35  40  45  50  55  60  65  70 | The policeman on the beat moved up the avenue impressively. The impressiveness was habitual and not for show, for spectators were few. The time was barely 10 o’clock at night, but chilly gusts of wind with a taste of rain in them had well-nigh de-peopled the streets.  Trying doors as he went, twirling his club with many intricate and artful movements, turning now and then to cast his watchful eye adown the pacific thoroughfare, the officer, with his stalwart form and slight swagger, made a fine picture of a guardian of the peace. The vicinity was one that kept early hours. Now and then you might see the lights of a cigar store or of an all-night lunch counter; but the majority of the doors belonged to business places that had long since been closed.  When about midway of a certain block the policeman suddenly slowed his walk. In the doorway of a darkened hardware store a man leaned, with an unlighted cigar in his mouth. As the policeman walked up to him, the man spoke up quickly.  ‘It’s all right, officer,’ he said, reassuringly. ‘I’m just waiting for a friend. It’s an appointment made twenty years ago. Sounds a little funny to you, doesn’t it? Well, I’ll explain if you’d like to make certain it’s all straight. About that long ago there used to be a restaurant where this store stands – ‘Big Joe’ Brady’s restaurant.’  ‘Until five years ago,’ said the policeman. ‘It was torn down then.’  The man in the doorway struck a match and lit his cigar. The light showed a pale, square-jawed face with keen eyes, and a little white scar near his right eyebrow. His scarfpin was a large diamond, oddly set.  ‘Twenty years ago tonight,’ said the man, ‘I dined here at ‘Big Joe’ Brady’s with Jimmy Wells, my best chum, and the finest chap in the world. He and I were raised here in New York, just like two brothers, together. I was eighteen and Jimmy was twenty. The next morning I was to start for the West to make my fortune. You couldn’t have dragged Jimmy out of New York; he thought it was the only place on earth. Well, we agreed that night that we would meet here again exactly twenty years from that date and time, no matter what our conditions might be or from what distance we might have to come. We figured that in twenty years each of us ought to have our destiny worked out and our fortunes made, whatever they were going to be.’  ‘It sounds pretty interesting,’ said the policeman. ‘Rather a long time between meets, though, it seems to me. Haven’t you heard from your friend since you left?’  ‘Well, yes, for a time we corresponded,’ said the other. ‘But after a year or two we lost track of each other. You see, the West is a pretty big proposition, and I kept hustling around over it pretty lively. But I know Jimmy will meet me here if he’s alive, for he always was the truest, staunchest old chap in the world. He’ll never forget. I came a thousand miles to stand in this door tonight, and it’s worth it if my old partner turns up.’  The waiting man pulled out a handsome watch, the lids of it set with small diamonds.  ‘Three minutes to ten,’ he announced. ‘It was exactly ten o’clock when we parted here at the restaurant door.’  ‘Did pretty well out West, didn’t you?’ asked the policeman.  ‘You bet! I hope Jimmy has done half as well. He was a kind of plodder, though, good fellow as he was. I’ve had to compete with some of the sharpest wits going to get my pile. A man gets in a groove in New York. It takes the West to put a razor-edge on him.’  The policeman twirled his club and took a step or two.  ‘I’ll be on my way. Hope your friend comes around all right. Going to call time on him sharp?’  ‘I should say not!’ said the other. ‘I’ll give him half an hour at least. If Jimmy is alive on earth he’ll be here by that time. So long, officer.’  ‘Goodnight, sir,’ said the policeman, passing on along his beat, trying doors as he went.  There was now a fine, cold drizzle falling, and the wind had risen from its uncertain puffs into a steady blow. The few foot passengers astir in that quarter hurried dismally and silently along with coat collars turned high and pocketed hands. And in the door of the hardware store the man who had come a thousand miles to fill an appointment, uncertain almost to absurdity, with the friend of his youth, smoked his cigar and waited.  About twenty minutes he waited, and then a tall man in a long overcoat, with collar turned up to his ears, hurried across from the opposite side of the street. He went directly to the waiting man.  ‘Is that you, Bob?’ he asked, doubtfully.  ‘Is that you, Jimmy Wells?’ cried the man in the door.  ‘Bless my heart!’ exclaimed the new arrival, grasping both the other’s hands with his own. ‘It’s Bob, sure as fate. I was certain I’d find you here if you were still in existence. Well, well, well! – twenty years is a long time. The old restaurant’s gone, Bob; I wish it had lasted, so we could have had another dinner there. How has the West treated you, old man?’  ‘Bully; it has given me everything I asked it for. You’ve changed lots, Jimmy. I never thought you were so tall by two or three inches.’  ‘Oh, I grew a bit after I was twenty.’  ‘Doing well in New York, Jimmy?’  ‘Moderately. I have a position in one of the city departments. Come on, Bob; we’ll go around to a place I know of and have a good long talk about old times.’  The two men started up the street, arm in arm. The man from the West, his egotism enlarged by success, was beginning to outline the history of his career. The other, submerged in his overcoat, listened with interest.  At the corner stood a drug store, brilliant with electric lights. When they came into this glare each of them turned simultaneously to gaze upon the other’s face.  The man from the West stopped suddenly and released his arm.  ‘You’re not Jimmy Wells,’ he snapped. ‘Twenty years is a long time, but not long enough to change a man’s nose from a Roman to a pug.’  ‘It sometimes changes a good man into a bad one,’ said the tall man. ‘You’ve been under arrest for ten minutes, ‘Silky’ Bob. Chicago thinks you may have dropped over our way and wires us she wants to have a chat with you. Going quietly, are you? That’s sensible. Now, before we go on to the station here’s a note I was asked to hand you. You may read it here at the window. It’s from Patrolman Wells.’  The man from the West unfolded the little piece of paper handed him. His hand was steady when he began to read, but it trembled a little by the time he had finished. The note was rather short.  ----------  *Bob,*  *I was at the appointed place on time. When you struck the match to light your cigar, I saw it was the face of the man wanted in Chicago. Somehow I couldn’t do it myself, so I went around and got a plain clothes man to do the job.*  *Jimmy –* | | |



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| **D** | **Ruthless**  William De Mille (1945) | A bottle and a boat  Description automatically generated |
| 5  10  15  20  25  30  35  40  45  50  55 | Outside, the woods lay in clear October sunlight: the autumn air was full of the sharp, exciting smell of moist, leaf-covered earth. Inside, a man smiled grimly as he turned from the bathroom cabinet, entered the primitive living room of his mountain camp, and crossed to a closet set in the pine wall. It was his special closet with a spring lock, and in it he kept guns, ammunition, fishing rods and liquor. Not even his wife was allowed to have a key, for Judson Webb loved his personal possessions and became furious if they were touched by any hand but his own.  The closet door stood open: he had been packing his things away for the winter, and in a few minutes he would be driving back to civilisation. As he looked at the shelf on which the liquor stood, his smile was not attractive. All the bottles were unopened, except one quart of Bourbon which was placed invitingly in front, a whiskey glass by itself. The bottle was less than half full. As he took it from the shelf, his wife spoke from the next bedroom. ‘Everything is packed, Judson,’ she said. ‘Hasn’t Alec come to turn the water off and get the keys?’  Alec lived about a mile down the road and acted as a caretaker for the city folks when they were away.  ‘He’s down at the lake taking the boats out of the water. He said he’d be backing in half an hour.’  Mabel came into the room carrying her suitcase. But she paused in surprise as she saw the bottle in her husband’s hand. ‘Judson!’ she exclaimed, ‘you’re not taking a drink at ten o’clock in the morning, are you?’  ‘You’re wrong, my dear,’ he chuckled, ‘I’m not taking anything out of this bottle; I’m only putting something into it.’ His closed hand opened, and he put two tiny white tablets on the table as he started to uncork the whiskey.  Her eyes narrowed as she watched him. She had learned to dread that tone of his voice; it was the tone he used when he was planning to ‘put something over’ in business.  ‘Whoever broke into my closet last winter and stole my liquor will probably try it again once we are out of here,’ he went on, ‘only this time he’ll wish he hadn’t.’  She caught her breath at this cruel vindictiveness as one by one he dropped the tablets into the bottle and held it up to watch them dissolve. ‘What are they?’ she asked, ‘something to make him sick?’  ‘And how!’ He seemed fascinated as he saw the Bourbon changing into a deadly drink. ‘At least no one has found an antidote: once it’s down, it’s the end.’ He corked the bottle and set it back on the shelf alongside the little whiskey glass. ‘Everything nice and handy,’ he remarked, ‘now, Mr Thief, when you break in, have a good drink; I won’t begrudge you this one.’  The woman’s face was pale. ‘Don’t do it, Judson,’ she gasped, ‘it’s horrible – it’s murder.’  ‘The law doesn’t call it murder if I shoot a thief who is entering my house by force,’ he said harshly. ‘Also, the use of rat poison is not forbidden. The only way any rat can get into this closet is to break in. What happens then has nothing to do with me.’  ‘Don’t do it, Judson,’ she begged, ‘the law doesn’t punish burglary by death; so what right have you to…’  ‘When it comes to protecting my property, I make my own laws.’ His deep voice was like that of a big dog growling at the possible loss of a bone.  ‘But all they did was to steal a little liquor,’ she pleaded, ‘probably some boys off on a lark. They didn’t do any real damage.’  ‘That’s not the point,’ he said. ‘If a man holds me up and robs me of five dollars, it makes me just as sore as if he took a hundred. A thief’s a thief.’  She made one last effort. ‘We won’t be here till next spring. I can’t bear to think of that death-trap waiting there all the time. Suppose something happens to us – and no one knows.’  He chuckled once more at her words. ‘We’ll take a chance on that,’ he said. ‘I’ve made my pile by taking chances. If I should die, you can do as you please. The stuff will be yours.’  It was useless to argue – she knew. He had always been ruthless in business and whenever anything crossed him. Things had to be done his way. She turned towards the door with a sigh. ‘I’ll walk down the road and say goodbye at the farmhouse,’ she said quietly, ‘you can pick me up there.’ She had made up her mind to tell Alec’s wife. Someone had to know.  ‘Okay, my dear, ‘he smiled, ‘and don’t worry about your poor little burglar. No one is going to get hurt who hasn’t got it coming to him.  As she went down the path, he started to close the closet door, then paused as he remembered his hunting boots outside on the porch. They belonged in the closet. So, leaving the door open, he went to fetch them from the heavy, rustic table on which they stood, along with his bag and topcoat.  Alec was coming up from the lake and waved to him from a distance. A chipmunk, hearing Judson’s heavy tread, left the acorn it was about to add to its store within the cabin wall and disappeared. When reaching for his boots, Judson stepped upon that acorn. His foot slid from under him and his head struck the massive table as he fell.  Several minutes later, he began to regain his senses. Alec’s strong arm was supporting his head as he lay on the porch, and a kindly voice was saying, ‘It wasn’t much of a fall, Mr Webb. You ain’t cut none; just knocked out for a minute. Here, take this. It’ll pull you together.’  A small whiskey glass was pressed to Judson’s lips. Dazed and half-conscious, he drank. | |

A bottle of alcohol and a glass of ice with Jack Daniel's in the background

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| **E** | **Charles**  Shirley Jackson (1948) | A yellow building with a clock on top  Description automatically generated |
| 5  10  15  20  25  30  35  40  45  50  55  60  65  70  75  80  85  90  95  100  105  110 | The day my son Laurie started kindergarten he renounced corduroy overalls with bibs and began wearing blue jeans with a belt; I watched him go off the first morning with the older girl next door, seeing clearly that an era of my life was ended, my sweet-voiced nursery-school tot replaced by a long-trousered, swaggering character who forgot to stop at the corner and wave good-bye to me.  He came home the same way, the front door slamming open, his cap on the floor, and the voice suddenly become raucous shouting, ‘isn’t anybody here?’  At lunch he spoke insolently to his father, spilled his baby sister’s milk, and remarked that his teacher said we were not to take the name of the Lord in vain.  ‘How was school today?’ I asked, elaborately casual.  ‘All right,’ he said.  ‘Did you learn anything?’ his father asked.  Laurie regarded his father coldly. ‘I didn’t learn nothing,’ he said.  ‘Anything,’ I said. ‘Didn’t learn anything’  ‘The teacher smacked a boy, though,’ Laurie said, addressing his bread and butter. ‘For being fresh,’ he added, with his mouth full.  ‘What did he do?’ I asked. ‘Who was it?’  Laurie thought. ‘It was Charles,’ he said. ‘He was fresh. The teacher smacked him and made him stand in a corner. He was awfully fresh.’  ‘What did he do?’ I asked again, but Laurie slid off his chair, took a cookie, and left, while his father was still saying, ‘see here, young man.’  The next day Laurie remarked at lunch, as soon as he sat down, ‘Well, Charles was bad again today.’ He grinned enormously and said, ‘Today Charles hit the teacher.’  ‘Good heavens,’ I said, mindful of the Lord’s name, ‘I suppose he got smacked again?’  ‘He sure did,’ Laurie said. ‘Look up,’ he said to his father.  ‘What?’ his father said, looking up.  ‘Look down,’ Laurie said. ‘Look at my thumb. Gee, you’re dumb.’ He began to laugh insanely.  ‘Why did Charles hit the teacher?’ I asked quickly.  ‘Because she tried to make him colour with red crayons,’  Laurie said. ‘Charles wanted to colour with green crayons so he hit the teacher and she smacked him and said nobody play with Charles but everybody did.’  The third day – it was Wednesday of the first week – Charles bounced a seesaw on to the head of a little girl and made her bleed, and the teacher made him stay inside all during recess. Thursday: Charles had to stand in a corner during story time because he kept pounding his feet on the floor. Friday: Charles was deprived of blackboard privileges because he threw chalk.  On Saturday I remarked to my husband, ‘Do you think kindergarten is too unsettling for Laurie? All this toughness, and bad grammar, and this Charles boy sounds like such a bad influence.’  ‘It’ll be all right,’ my husband said reassuringly. ‘Bound to be people like Charles in the world. Might as well meet them now as later.’  On Monday Laurie came home late, full of news. ‘Charles,’ he shouted as he came up the hill; I was waiting anxiously on the front steps. ‘Charles,’ Laurie yelled all the way up the hill, ‘Charles was bad again.’  ‘Come right in,’ I said, as soon as he came close enough. ‘Lunch is waiting.’  ‘You know what Charles did?’ he demanded, following me through the door. ‘Charles yelled so in school they sent a boy in from first grade to tell the teacher she had to make Charles keep quiet, and so Charles had to stay after school. And so all the children stayed to watch him.’  ‘What did he do?’ I asked.  ‘He just sat there,’ Laurie said, climbing into his chair at the table. ‘Hi, Pop, y’old dust mop.’  ‘Charles had to stay after school today,’ I told my husband.  ‘Everyone stayed with him.’  ‘What does this Charles look like?’ my husband asked Laurie. ‘What’s his other name?’  ‘He’s bigger than me,’ Laurie said. ‘And he doesn’t have any rubbers and he doesn’t ever wear a jacket.’  Monday night was the first Parent-Teachers meeting, and only the fact that the baby had a cold kept me from going; I wanted passionately to meet Charles’s mother. On Tuesday, Laurie remarked suddenly, ‘Our teacher had a friend come to see her in school today.’  ‘Charles’s mother?’ my husband and I asked simultaneously.  ‘Naaah,’ Laurie said scornfully. ‘It was a man who came and made us do exercises, we had to touch our toes. Look...’  He climbed down from his chair and squatted down and touched his toes. ‘Like this,’ he said. He got solemnly back into his chair and said, picking up his fork, ‘Charles didn’t even do exercises.’  ‘That’s fine,’ I said heartily. ‘Didn’t Charles want to do exercises?’  ‘Naaah,’ Laurie said. ‘Charles was so fresh to the teacher’s friend he wasn’t let do exercises.’  ‘Fresh again?’ I said.  ‘He kicked the teacher’s friend,’ Laurie said. ‘The teacher’s friend told Charles to touch his toes like I just did and Charles kicked him.’  ‘What are they going to do about Charles, do you suppose?’ Laurie’s father asked him.  Laurie shrugged elaborately. ‘Throw him out of school, I guess,’ he said.  Wednesday and Thursday were routine; Charles yelled during story hour and hit a boy in the stomach and made him cry. On Friday, Charles stayed after school again and so did all the other children. With the third week of kindergarten, Charles was an institution in our family; the baby was being a Charles when she cried all afternoon; Laurie did a Charles when he filled his wagon full of mud and pulled it through the kitchen; even my husband, when he caught his elbow in the telephone cord and pulled telephone, ashtray, and a bowl of flowers off the table said, ‘Looks like Charles.’  During the third and fourth weeks it looked like a reformation in Charles; Laurie reported grimly at lunch on Thursday of the third week, ‘Charles was so good today the teacher gave him an apple.’  ‘What?’ I said, and my husband added warily, ‘You mean Charles?’  ‘Charles,’ Laurie said. ‘He gave the crayons around and he picked up the books, and the teacher said he was her helper.’  ‘What happened?’ I asked incredulously.  ‘He was her helper, that’s all,’ Laurie said, and shrugged.  ‘Can this be true, about Charles?’ I asked my husband that night. ‘Can something like this happen?’  ‘Wait and see,’ my husband said cynically. ‘When you’ve got a Charles to deal with, this may mean he’s only plotting.’  He seemed to be wrong. For over a week Charles was the teacher’s helper; each day he handed things out and he picked things up; no one had to stay after school.  ‘The PTA meeting’s next week again,’ I told my husband one evening. ‘I’m going to find Charles’s mother there.’  ‘Ask her what happened to Charles,’ my husband said. ‘I’d like to know.’  ‘I’d like to know myself,’ I said.  On Friday of that week things were back to normal. ‘You know what Charles did today?’ Laurie demanded at the lunch table, in a voice slightly awed. ‘He told a little girl to say a word and she said it and the teacher washed her mouth out with soap and Charles laughed.’  ‘What word?’ his father asked unwisely, and Laurie said, ‘I’ll have to whisper it to you, it’s so bad.’ He got down off his chair and went to his father. His father bent his head down and Laurie whispered joyfully. His father’s eyes widened.  ‘Did Charles tell the little girl to say that?’ he asked respectfully.  ‘She said it twice,’ Laurie said. ‘Charles told her to say it twice.’  ‘What happened to Charles?’ my husband asked.  ‘Nothing,’ Laurie said. ‘He was passing out the crayons.’  Monday morning: Charles abandoned the little girl and said the evil word himself three or four times, getting his mouth washed out with soap each time. He also threw chalk.  My husband came to the door with me that evening as I set out for the PTA meeting. ‘Invite her over for a cup of tea after the meeting,’ he said. ‘I want to get a look at her.’  ‘If only she’s there,’ I said prayerfully.  ‘She’ll be there,’ my husband said. ‘I don’t see how they could hold a PTA meeting without Charles’s mother.’  At the meeting I sat restlessly, scanning each comfortable matronly face, trying to determine which one hid the secret of Charles. None of them looked to me haggard enough. No one stood up in the meeting and apologised for the way her son had been acting. No one mentioned Charles. After the meeting I identified and sought out Laurie’s kindergarten teacher. She had a plate with a cup of tea and a piece of chocolate cake; I had a plate with a cup of tea and a piece of marshmallow cake. We maneuvered up to one another cautiously and smiled.  ‘I’ve been so anxious to meet you,’ I said. ‘I’m Laurie’s mother.’  ‘We’re all so interested in Laurie,’ she said.  ‘Well, he certainly likes kindergarten,’ I said. ‘He talks about it all the time.’  ‘We had a little trouble adjusting, the first week or so,’ she said primly, ‘but now he’s a fine little helper. With occasional lapses, of course.’  ‘Laurie usually adjusts very quickly,’ I said. ‘I suppose this time it’s Charles’s influence.’  ‘Charles?’  ‘Yes,’ I said, laughing, ‘you must have your hands full in that kindergarten, with Charles.’  ‘Charles?’ she said. ‘We don’t have any Charles in the kindergarten.’ | |
| **F** | **Lamb to the Slaughter**  Roald Dahl (1953) | A cartoon of a chicken leg  Description automatically generated |
| 5  10  15  20  25  30  35  40  45  50  55  60  65  70  75  80  85  90  95  100  105  110  115  120  125  130  135  140  145  150  155  160  165  170  175  180  185  190  195  200  205  210  215  220  225 | The room was warm and clean, the curtains drawn, the two table lamps alight – hers and the one by the empty chair opposite. On the sideboard behind her, two tall glasses, soda water, whiskey. Fresh ice cubes in the Thermos bucket. Mary Maloney was waiting for her husband to come home from work.  Now and again she would glance up at the clock, but without anxiety, merely to please herself with the thought that each minute gone by made it nearer the time when he would come. There was a slow smiling air about her, and about everything she did. The drop of a head as she bent over her sewing was curiously tranquil. Her skin – for this was her sixth month with child – had acquired a wonderful translucent quality, the mouth was soft, and the eyes, with their new placid look, seemed larger darker than before. When the clock said ten minutes to five, she began to listen, and a few moments later, punctually as always, she heard the tires on the gravel outside, and the car door slamming, the footsteps passing the window, the key turning in the lock. She laid aside her sewing, stood up, and went forward to kiss him as he came in.  ‘Hullo darling,’ she said.  ‘Hullo darling,’ he answered.  She took his coat and hung it in the closet. Then she walked over and made the drinks, a strongish one for him, a weak one for herself; and soon she was back again in her chair with the sewing, and he in the other, opposite, holding the tall glass with both hands, rocking it so the ice cubes tinkled against the side.  For her, this was always a blissful time of day. She knew he didn’t want to speak much until the first drink was finished, and she, on her side, was content to sit quietly, enjoying his company after the long hours alone in the house. She loved to luxuriate in the presence of this man, and to feel – almost as a sunbather feels the sun – that warm male glow that came out of him to her when they were alone together. She loved him for the way he sat loosely in a chair, for the way he came in a door, or moved slowly across the room with long strides. She loved intent, far look in his eyes when they rested in her, the funny shape of the mouth, and especially the way he remained silent about his tiredness, sitting still with himself until the whiskey had taken it away.  ‘Tired darling?’  ‘Yes,’ he said. ‘I’m tired,’ And as he spoke, he did an unusual thing. He lifted his glass and drained it in one swallow although there was still half of it, at least half of it left. She wasn’t really watching him, but she knew what he had done because she heard the ice cubes falling back against the bottom of the empty glass when he lowered his arm. He paused a moment, leaning forward in the chair, then he got up and went slowly over to fetch himself another.  ‘I’ll get it!’ she cried, jumping up.  ‘Sit down,’ he said.  When he came back, she noticed that the new drink was dark amber with the quantity of whiskey in it.  ‘Darling, shall I get your slippers?’  ‘No.’  She watched him as he began to sip the dark yellow drink, and she could see little oily swirls in the liquid because it was so strong.  ‘I think it’s a shame,’ she said, ‘that when a policeman gets to be as senior as you, they keep him walking about on his feet all day long.’  He didn’t answer, so she bent her head again and went on with her sewing; but each time he lifted the drink to his lips, she heard the ice cubes clinking against the side of the glass.  ‘Darling,’ she said. ‘Would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven’t made any supper because it’s Thursday.’  ‘No,’ he said.  ‘If you’re too tired to eat out,’ she went on, ‘it’s still not too late. There’s plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer, and you can have it right here and not even move out of the chair.’ Her eyes waited on him for an answer, a smile, a little nod, but he made no sign.  ‘Anyway,’ she went on, ‘I’ll get you some cheese and crackers first.’  ‘I don’t want it,’ he said.  She moved uneasily in her chair, the large eyes still watching his face. ‘But you must eat! I’ll fix it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like.’  She stood up and placed her sewing on the table by the lamp.  ‘Sit down,’ he said. ‘Just for a minute, sit down.’  It wasn’t till then that she began to get frightened.  ‘Go on,’ he said. ‘Sit down.’  She lowered herself back slowly into the chair, watching him all the time with those large, bewildered eyes. He had finished the second drink and was staring down into the glass, frowning.  ‘Listen,’ he said. ‘I’ve got something to tell you.’  ‘What is it, darling? What’s the matter?’  He had now become absolutely motionless, and he kept his head down so that the light from the lamp beside him fell across the upper part of his face, leaving the chin and mouth in shadow. She noticed there was a little muscle moving near the corner of his left eye.  ‘This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I’m afraid,’ he said. ‘But I’ve thought about it a good deal and I’ve decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won’t blame me too much.’ And he told her. It didn’t take long, four or five minutes at most, and she say very still through it all, watching him with a kind of dazed horror as he went further and further away from her with each word.  ‘So there it is,’ he added. ‘And I know it’s kind of a bad time to be telling you, bet there simply wasn’t any other way. Of course I’ll give you money and see you’re looked after. But there needn’t really be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn’t be very good for my job.’  Her first instinct was not to believe any of it, to reject it all. It occurred to her that perhaps he hadn’t even spoken, that she herself had imagined the whole thing. Maybe, if she went about her business and acted as though she hadn’t been listening, then later, when she sort of woke up again, she might find none of it had ever happened.  ‘I’ll get the supper,’ she managed to whisper, and this time he didn’t stop her.  When she walked across the room, she couldn’t feel her feet touching the floor. She couldn’t feel anything at all – except a slight nausea and a desire to vomit. Everything was automatic now – down the steps to the cellar, the light switch, the deep freeze, the hand inside the cabinet taking hold of the first object it met. She lifted it out and looked at it. It was wrapped in paper, so she took off the paper and looked at it again.  A leg of lamb.  All right then, they would have lamb for supper. She carried it upstairs, holding the thin bone-end of it with both her hands, and as she went through the living-room, she saw him standing over by the window with his back to her, and she stopped.  ‘For God’s sake,’ he said, hearing her, but not turning round. ‘Don’t make supper for me. I’m going out.’  At that point, Mary Maloney simply walked up behind him and without any pause she swung the big frozen leg of lamb high in the air and brought it down as hard as she could on the back of his head. She might just as well have hit him with a steel club.  She stepped back a pace, waiting, and the funny thing was that he remained standing there for at least four or five seconds, gently swaying. Then he crashed to the carpet. The violence of the crash, the noise, the small table overturning, helped bring her out of the shock. She came out slowly, feeling cold and surprised, and she stood for a while blinking at the body, still holding the ridiculous piece of meat tight with both hands.  All right, she told herself. So I’ve killed him.  It was extraordinary, now, how clear her mind became all of a sudden. She began thinking very fast. As the wife of a detective, she knew quite well what the penalty would be. That was fine. It made no difference to her. In fact, it would be a relief. On the other hand, what about the child? What were the laws about murderers with unborn children? Did they kill then both-mother and child? Or did they wait until the tenth month? What did they do? Mary Maloney didn’t know. And she certainly wasn’t prepared to take a chance.  She carried the meat into the kitchen, placed it in a pan, turned the oven on high, and shoved t inside. Then she washed her hands and ran upstairs to the bedroom. She sat down before the mirror, tidied her hair, touched up her lops and face. She tried a smile. It came out rather peculiar. She tried again.  ‘Hullo Sam,’ she said brightly, aloud.  The voice sounded peculiar too.  ‘I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas.’  That was better. Both the smile and the voice were coming out better now. She rehearsed it several times more. Then she ran downstairs, took her coat, went out the back door, down the garden, into the street. It wasn’t six o’clock yet and the lights were still on in the grocery shop.  ‘Hullo Sam,’ she said brightly, smiling at the man behind the counter.  ‘Why, good evening, Mrs Maloney. How’re you?’  ‘I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas.’  The man turned and reached up behind him on the shelf for the peas.  ‘Patrick’s decided he’s tired and doesn’t want to eat out tonight,’ she told him. ‘We usually go out Thursdays, you know, and now he’s caught me without any vegetables in the house.’  ‘Then how about meat, Mrs Maloney?’  ‘No, I’ve got meat, thanks. I got a nice leg of lamb from the freezer.’  ‘Oh.’  ‘I don’t know much like cooking it frozen, Sam, but I’m taking a chance on it this time. You think it’ll be all right?’  ‘Personally,’ the grocer said, ‘I don’t believe it makes any difference. You want these Idaho potatoes?’  ‘Oh yes, that’ll be fine. Two of those.’  ‘Anything else?’ The grocer cocked his head on one side, looking at her pleasantly. ‘How about afterwards? What you going to give him for afterwards?’  ‘Well – what would you suggest, Sam?’  The man glanced around his shop. ‘How about a nice big slice of cheesecake? I know he likes that.’  ‘Perfect,’ she said. ‘He loves it.’ And when it was all wrapped and she had paid, she put on her brightest smile and said,  ‘Thank you, Sam. Goodnight.’  ‘Goodnight, Mrs Maloney. And thank you.’  And now, she told herself as she hurried back, all she was doing now, she was returning home to her husband and he was waiting for his supper; and she must cook it good, and make it as tasty as possible because the poor man was tired; and if, when she entered the house, she happened to find anything unusual, or tragic, or terrible, then naturally it would be a shock and she’d become frantic with grief and horror. Mind you, she wasn’t expecting to find anything. She was just going home with the vegetables. Mrs Patrick Maloney going home with the vegetables on Thursday evening to cook supper for her husband.  That’s the way, she told herself. Do everything right and natural. Keep things absolutely natural and there’ll be no need for any acting at all. Therefore, when she entered the kitchen by the back door, she was humming a little tune to herself and smiling.  ‘Patrick!’ she called. ‘How are you, darling?’  She put the parcel down on the table and went through into the living room; and when she saw him lying there on the floor with his legs doubled up and one arm twisted back underneath his body, it really was rather a shock. All the old love and longing for him welled up inside her, and she ran over to him, knelt down beside him, and began to cry her heart out. It was easy. No acting was necessary.  A few minutes later she got up and went to the phone. She knew the number of the police station and when the man at the other end answered, she cried to him, ‘Quick! Come quick! Patrick’s dead!’  ‘Who’s speaking?’  ‘Mrs Maloney. Mrs Patrick Maloney.’  ‘You mean Patrick Maloney’s dead?’  ‘I think so,’ she sobbed. ‘He’s lying on the floor and I think he’s dead.’  ‘Be right over,’ the man said.  The car came very quickly, and when she opened the front door, two policeman walked in. She knew them both – she knew nearly all the men at that precinct and she fell right into a chair, then went over to join the other one, who was called O’Malley, kneeling by the body.  ‘Is he dead?’ she cried.  ‘I’m afraid he is. What happened?’  Briefly, she told her story about going out to the grocer and coming back to find him on the floor. While she was talking, crying and talking, Noonan discovered a small patch of congealed blood on the dead man’s head. He showed it to O’Malley who got up at once and hurried to the phone.  Soon, other men began to come into the house. First a doctor, then two detectives, one of whom she knew by name. Later, a police photographer arrived and took pictures, and a man who know about fingerprints. There was a great deal of whispering and muttering beside the corpse, and the detectives kept asking her a lot of questions. But they always treated her kindly. She told her story again, this time right from the beginning, when Patrick had come in, and she was sewing, and he was tired, so tired he hadn’t wanted to go out for supper. She told how she’d put the meat in the oven – ‘it’s there now, cooking’ – and how she’d slipped out to the grocer for vegetables and come back to find him lying on the floor.  ‘Which grocer?’ one of the detectives asked.  She told him, and he turned and whispered something to the other detective who immediately went outside into the street.  In fifteen minutes he was back with a page of notes, and there was more whispering, and through her sobbing she heard a few of the whispered phrases – ‘... Acted quite normal... Very cheerful... Wanted to give him a good supper... Peas... Cheesecake... Impossible that she...’  After a while, the photographer and the doctor departed and two other men came in and took the corpse away on a stretcher. Then the fingerprint man went away. The two detectives remained, and so did the two policemen. They were exceptionally nice to her, and Jack Noonan asked if she wouldn’t rather go somewhere else, to her sister’s house perhaps, or to his own wife who would take care of her and put her up for the night.  No, she said. She didn’t feel she could move even a yard at the moment. Would they mind awfully of she stayed just where she was until she felt better. She didn’t feel too good at the moment, she really didn’t.  Then hadn’t she better lie down on the bed? Jack Noonan asked.  No, she said. She’d like to stay right where she was, in this chair. A little later, perhaps, when she felt better, she would move.  So they left her there while they went about their business, searching the house. Occasionally on of the detectives asked her another question. Sometimes Jack Noonan spoke at her gently as he passed by. Her husband, he told her, had been killed by a blow on the back of the head administered with a heavy blunt instrument, almost certainly a large piece of metal. They were looking for the weapon. The murderer may have taken it with him, but on the other hand he may have thrown it away or hidden it somewhere on the premises.  ‘It’s the old story,’ he said. ‘Get the weapon, and you’ve got the man.’  Later, one of the detectives came up and sat beside her. Did she know, he asked, of anything in the house that could’ve been used as the weapon? Would she mind having a look around to see if anything was missing – a very big spanner, for example, or a heavy metal vase.  They didn’t have any heavy metal vases, she said.  ‘Or a big spanner?’  She didn’t think they had a big spanner. But there might be some things like that in the garage. The search went on. She knew that there were other policemen in the garden all around the house. She could hear their footsteps on the gravel outside, and sometimes she saw a flash of a torch through a chink in the curtains. It began to get late, nearly nine she noticed by the clock on the mantle. The four men searching the rooms seemed to be growing weary, a trifle exasperated.  ‘Jack,’ she said, the next tome Sergeant Noonan went by. ‘Would you mind giving me a drink?’  ‘Sure I’ll give you a drink. You mean this whiskey?’  ‘Yes please. But just a small one. It might make me feel better.’  He handed her the glass.  ‘Why don’t you have one yourself,’ she said. ‘You must be awfully tired. Please do. You’ve been very good to me.’  ‘Well,’ he answered. ‘It’s not strictly allowed, but I might take just a drop to keep me going.’  One by one the others came in and were persuaded to take a little nip of whiskey. They stood around rather awkwardly with the drinks in their hands, uncomfortable in her presence, trying to say consoling things to her. Sergeant Noonan wandered into the kitchen, come out quickly and said, ‘Look, Mrs Maloney. You know that oven of yours is still on, and the meat still inside.’  ‘Oh dear me!’ she cried. ‘So it is!’  ‘I better turn it off for you, hadn’t I?’  ‘Will you do that, Jack. Thank you so much.’  When the sergeant returned the second time, she looked at him with her large, dark tearful eyes.  ‘Jack Noonan,’ she said.  ‘Yes?’  ‘Would you do me a small favour – you and these others?’  ‘We can try, Mrs Maloney.’  ‘Well,’ she said. ‘Here you all are, and good friends of dear Patrick’s too, and helping to catch the man who killed him. You must be terrible hungry by now because it’s long past your suppertime, and I know Patrick would never forgive me, God bless his soul, if I allowed you to remain in his house without offering you decent hospitality. Why don’t you eat up that lamb that’s in the oven. It’ll be cooked just right by now.’  ‘Wouldn’t dream of it,’ Sergeant Noonan said.  ‘Please,’ she begged. ‘Please eat it. Personally I couldn’t tough a thing, certainly not what’s been in the house when he was here. But it’s all right for you. It’d be a favour to me if you’d eat it up. Then you can go on with your work again afterwards.’  There was a good deal of hesitating among the four policemen, but they were clearly hungry, and in the end they were persuaded to go into the kitchen and help themselves. The woman stayed where she was, listening to them speaking among themselves, their voices thick and sloppy because their mouths were full of meat.  ‘Have some more, Charlie?’  ‘No. Better not finish it.’  ‘She wants us to finish it. She said so. Be doing her a favour.’  ‘Okay then. Give me some more.’  ‘That’s the hell of a big club the gut must’ve used to hit poor Patrick,’ one of them was saying. ‘The doc says his skull was smashed all to pieces just like from a sledgehammer.’  ‘That’s why it ought to be easy to find.’  ‘Exactly what I say.’  ‘Whoever done it, they’re not going to be carrying a thing like that around with them longer than they need.’  One of them belched.  ‘Personally, I think it’s right here on the premises.’  ‘Probably right under our very noses. What you think, Jack?’  And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle. | |



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| **G** | **Examination Day**  Henry Slesar (1958) |  |
| 5  10  15  20  25  30  35  40  45  50  55  60  65  70  75  80  85  90 | The Jordans never spoke of the exam, not until their son, Dickie, was twelve years old. It was on his birthday that Mrs Jordan first mentioned the subject in his presence, and the anxious manner of her speech caused her husband to answer sharply.  ‘Forget about it,’ he said. ‘He’ll do all right.’  They were at breakfast table, and the boy looked up from his plate curiously. He was an alert-eyed youngster with flat blond hair and a quick, nervous manner. He didn’t understand what the sudden tension was about, but he did know that today was his birthday, and he wanted harmony above all. Somewhere in the little apartment there were wrapped, beribboned packages waiting to be opened, and in the tiny wall-kitchen something warm and sweet was being prepared in the automatic stove. He wanted the day to be happy, and the moistness of his mother’s eyes, the scowl on his father’s face, spoiled the mood of fluttering expectation with which he had greeted the morning.  ‘What exam?’ he asked.  His mother looked at the tablecloth. ‘It’s just a sort of Government Intelligence test they give children at the age of twelve. You’ll be taking it next week. It’s nothing to worry about.’  ‘You mean a test like in school?’  ‘Something like that,’ his father said, getting up from the table. ‘Go and read your comics, Dickie.’  The boy rose and wandered towards that part of the living room which had been ‘his’ corner since infancy. He touched the topmost comic of the stack, but seemed uninterested in the colourful squares of fast-paced action. He wandered towards the window, and peered gloomily at the veil of mist that shrouded the glass.  ‘Why did it have to rain today?’ he said. ‘Why couldn’t it rain tomorrow?’  His father, now slumped into an armchair with the Government newspaper, rattled the sheets in vexation. ‘Because it just did, that’s all. Rain makes the grass grow.’  ‘Why, Dad?’  ‘Because it does, that’s all.’  Dickie puckered his brow. ‘What makes it green, though? The grass?’  ‘Nobody knows,’ his father snapped, then immediately regretted his abruptness. Later in the day, it was birthday time again. His mother beamed as she handed over the brightly coloured packages, and even his father managed a grin and a rumple-of-the-hair. He kissed his mother and shook hands gravely with his father. Then the birthday cake was brought forth, and the ceremonies concluded. An hour later, seated by the window, he watched the sun force its way between the clouds.  ‘Dad,’ he said, ‘how far away is the sun?’  ‘Five thousand miles,’ his father said.  Dickie sat at the breakfast table and again saw moisture in his mother’s eyes. He didn’t connect her tears with the exam until his father suddenly brought the subject to light again.  ‘Well, Dickie,’ he said, with a manly frown, ‘you’ve got an appointment today.’  ‘I know Dad. I hope – ’  ‘Now, it’s nothing to worry about. Thousands of children take this test every day. The Government wants to know how smart you are, Dickie. That’s all there is to it.’  ‘I get good marks in school,’ he said hesitantly.  ‘This is different. This is a – special kind of test. They give you this stuff to drink, you see, and then you go into a room where there’s a sort of machine – ‘  ‘What stuff to drink?’ Dickie said.  ‘It’s nothing. It tastes like peppermint. It’s just to make sure you answer the questions truthfully. Not that the Government thinks you won’t tell the truth, but it makes sure.’  Dickie’s face showed puzzlement, and a touch of fright. He looked at his mother, and she composed her face into a misty smile.  ‘Everything will be all right,’ she said.  ‘Of course it will,’ his father agreed. ‘You’re a good boy, Dickie; you’ll make out fine.  Then we’ll come home and celebrate. All right?’  ‘Yes sir,’ Dickie said.  They entered the Government Educational Building fifteen minutes before the appointed hour. They crossed the marble floors of the great pillared lobby, passed beneath an archway and entered an automatic lift that brought them to the fourth floor. There was a young man wearing an insignia-less tunic, seated at a polished desk in front of Room 404. He held a clipboard in his hand, and he checked the list down to the Js and permitted the Jordans to enter.  The room was as cold and official as a courtroom, with long benches flanking metal tables. There were several fathers and sons already there, and a thin-lipped woman with cropped black hair was passing out sheets of paper.  Mr Jordan filled out the form and returned it to the clerk. Then he told Dickie: ‘It won’t be long now. When they call your name, you just go through the doorway at the end of the room.’ He indicated the portal with his finger.  A concealed loudspeaker crackled and called off the first name. Dickie saw a boy leave his father’s side reluctantly and walk slowly towards the door. At five minutes to eleven, they called the name of Jordan.  ‘Good luck, son,’ his father said, without looking at him. ‘I’ll call for you when the test is over.’  Dickie walked to the door and turned the knob. The room inside was dim, and he could barely make out the features of the grey-tunicked attendant who greeted him.  ‘Sit down,’ the man said softly. He indicated a high stool beside his desk. ‘Your name’s Richard Jordan?’  ‘Yes, sir.’  ‘Your classification number is 600-115. Drink this, Richard.’  He lifted a plastic cup from the desk and handed it to the boy. The liquid inside had the consistency of buttermilk, tasted only vaguely of the promised peppermint. Dickie downed it and handed the man the empty cup. He sat in silence, feeling drowsy, while the man wrote busily on a sheet of paper. Then the attendant looked at his watch and rose to stand only inches from Dickie’s face. He unclipped a pen-like object from the pocket of his tunic and flashed a tiny light into the boy’s eyes.  ‘All right,’ he said. ‘Come with me, Richard.’  He led Dickie to the end of the room, where a single wooden armchair faced a multi-dialled computing machine. There was a microphone on the left arm of the chair, and when the boy sat down, he found its pinpoint head conveniently at his mouth.  ‘Now just relax, Richard. You’ll be asked some questions, and you think them over carefully. Then give your answers into the microphone. The machine will take care of the rest.’  ‘Yes, sir.’  ‘I’ll leave you alone now. Whenever you want to start, just say ‘ready’ into the microphone.’  ‘Yes, sir.’  The man squeezed his shoulder and left.  Dickie said, ‘Ready.’  Lights appeared on the machine, and a mechanism whirred. A voice said: ‘Complete this sequence: one, four, seven, ten…’  Mr and Mrs Jordan were in the living room, not speaking, not even speculating.  It was almost four o’clock when the telephone rang. The woman tried to reach it first, but her husband was quicker.  ‘Mr Jordan?’  The voice was clipped: a brisk, official voice.  ‘Yes, speaking.’  ‘This is the Government Educational Service. Your son, Richard M Jordan, Classification 600-115 has completed the Government examination. We regret to inform you that his intelligence quotient is above the Government regulation, according to Rule 84 Section 5 of the New Code.’  Across the room, the woman cried out, knowing nothing except the emotion she read on her husband’s face.  ‘You may specify by telephone,’ the voice droned on, ‘whether you wish his body interred by the Government, or would you prefer a private burial place? The fee for Government burial is ten dollars.’ | |

A group of children in a classroom

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| **H** | **He-y, Come On Ou-t!**  Shinichi Hoshi (1971) |  |
| 5  10  15  20  25  30  35  40  45  50  55  60  65  70  75  80 | The typhoon had passed and the sky was a gorgeous blue. Even a certain village not far from the city had suffered damage. A little distance from the village and near the mountains, a small shrine had been swept away by a landslide.  ‘I wonder how long that shrine’s been here.’  ‘Well, in any case, it must have been here since an awfully long time ago.’  ‘We’ve got to rebuild it right away.’  While the villagers exchanged views, several more of their number came over.  ‘It sure was wrecked.’  ‘I think it used to be right here.’  ‘No, looks like it was a little more over there.’  Just then one of them raised his voice. ‘Hey what in the world is this hole?’ Where they had all gathered there was a hole about a meter in diameter. They peered in, but it was so dark nothing could be seen. However, it gave one the feeling that it was so deep it went clear through to the centre of the earth. There was even one person who said, ‘I wonder if it’s a fox’s hole.’  *He-y, come on ou-t*! shouted a young man into the hole. There was no echo from the bottom. Next, he picked up a pebble and was about to throw it in.  ‘You might bring down a curse on us. Lay off,’ warned an old man, but the younger one energetically threw the pebble in. As before, however, there was no answering response from the bottom. The villagers cut down some trees, tied them with rope and made a fence which they put around the hole. Then they repaired to the village.  ‘What do you suppose we ought to do?’  ‘Shouldn’t we build the shrine up just as it was over the hole?’  A day passed with no agreement. The news travelled fast, and a car from the newspaper company rushed over. In no time a scientist came out, and with an all-knowing expression on his face he went over to the hole. Next, a bunch of gawking curiosity seekers showed up; one could also pick out here and there men of shifty glances who appeared to be concessionaires. Concerned that someone might fall into the hole, a policeman from the local substation kept a careful watch.  One newspaper reporter tied a weight to the end of a long cord and lowered it into the hole. A long way down it went. The cord ran out, however, and he tried to pull it out, but it would not come back up. Two or three people helped out, but when they all pulled too hard, the cord parted at the edge of the hole. Another reporter, a camera in hand, who had been watching all of this, quietly untied a stout rope that had been wound around his waist.  The scientist contacted people at his laboratory and had them bring out a high-powered bull horn, with which he was going to check out the echo from the hole’s bottom. He tried switching through various sounds, but there was no echo. The scientist was puzzled, but he could not very well give up with everyone watching him so intently. He put the bull horn right up to the hole, turned it to its highest volume, and let it sound continuously for a long time. It was a noise that would have carried several dozen kilometres above ground. But the hole just calmly swallowed up the sound.  In his own mind the scientist was at a loss, but with a look of apparent composure he cut off the sound and, in a manner suggesting that the whole thing had a perfectly plausible explanation, said simply, ‘Fill it in.’ Safer to get rid of something one didn’t understand. The onlookers, disappointed that this was all that was going to happen, prepared to disperse. Just then one of the concessionaires, having broken through the throng and come forward, made a proposal.  ‘Let me have that hole. I’ll fill it in for you.’  ‘We’d be grateful to you for filling it in,’ replied the mayor of the village, ‘but we can’t very well give you the hole. We have to build a shrine there.’  ‘If it’s a shrine you want, I’ll build you a fine one later. Shall I make it with an attached meeting hall?’  Before the mayor could answer, the people of the village all shouted out.  ‘Really? Well, in that case, we ought to have it closer to the village.’  ‘It’s just an old hole. We’ll give it to you!’  So it was settled. And the mayor, of course, had no objection.  The concessionaire was true to his promise. It was small, but closer to the village he did build for them a shrine with an attached meeting hall. About the time the autumn festival was held at the new shrine, the hole-filling company established by the concessionaire hung out its small shingle at a shack near the hole. The concessionaire had his cohorts mount a loud campaign in the city. ‘We’ve got a fabulously deep hole!  ‘Scientists say it’s at least five thousand meters deep! Perfect for the disposal of such things as waste from nuclear reactors.’  Government authorities granted permission. Nuclear power plants fought for contracts. The people of the village were a bit worried about this, but they consented when it was explained that there would be absolutely no above-ground contamination for several thousand years and that they would share in the profits. Into the bargain, very shortly a magnificent road was built from the city to the village. Trucks rolled in over the road, transporting lead boxes. Above the hole the lids were opened, and the wastes from nuclear reactors tumbled away into the hole. From the Foreign Ministry and the Defence Agency boxes of unnecessary classified documents were brought for disposal. Officials who came to supervise the disposal held discussions on golf. The lesser functionaries, as they threw in the papers, chatted about pinball.  The hole showed no signs of filling up. It was awfully deep, thought some; or else it might be very spacious at the bottom. Little by little the hole-filling company expanded its business. Bodies of animals used in contagious disease experiments at the universities were brought out, and to these were added the unclaimed corpses of vagrants. Better than dumping all of its garbage in the ocean, went the thinking in the city, and plans were made for a long pipe to carry it to the hole.  The hole gave peace of mind to the dwellers of the city. They concentrated solely on producing one thing after another. Everyone disliked thinking about the eventual consequences. People wanted only to work for production companies and sales corporations; they had no interest in becoming junk dealers. But, it was thought, these problems too would gradually be resolved by the hole.  Young girls whose betrothals had been arranged discarded old diaries in the hole. There were also those who were inaugurating new love affairs and threw into the hole old photographs of themselves taken with former sweethearts. The police felt comforted as they used the hole to get rid of accumulations of expertly done counterfeit bills. Criminals breathed easier after throwing material evidence into the hole. Whatever one wished to discard, the hole accepted it all. The hole cleansed the city of its filth; the sea and sky seemed to have become a bit clearer than before. Aiming at the heavens, new buildings went on being constructed one after the other.  One day, atop the high steel frame of a new building under construction, a workman was taking a break. Above his head he heard a voice shout: *He-y, come on ou-t*! But, in the sky to which he lifted his gaze there was nothing at all. A clear blue sky merely spread overall. He thought it must be his imagination. Then, as he resumed his former position, from the direction where the voice had come, a small pebble skimmed by him and fell on past. The man, however, was gazing in idle reverie at the city’s skyline growing ever more beautiful, and he failed to notice. | |