

The Open Window Summary and Analysis of The Open Window

Summary

Framton Nuttel is a single man in a new town. His sister has arranged for him to meet several of her acquaintances to prevent him from becoming lonely there.

On one such visit, [Vera](#), the 15-year-old niece of Framton's latest host, [Mrs. Sappleton](#), invites him to sit and wait with her while her aunt readies. As he waits, Framton anxiously thinks about an appropriate way to compliment the young girl while reserving the highest flattery for her aunt. However, before he can decide what to say, Vera breaks the silence and asks Framton whether he knows many people in town.

He admits to being a newcomer who knows "hardly a soul" and explains with a note of exhaustion that he is in the process of visiting all the contacts his sister made in the town four years ago when she worked at the rectory (225). When Vera asks how well he knows her aunt, he confesses that he doesn't know much about her besides her address and name (225). After answering, Framton wonders to himself whether Mrs. Sappleton is married, and he notes signs of "masculine habitation" in the room (225).

After determining that her aunt is a virtual stranger to Framton, Vera decides to inform him of her aunt's "great tragedy" which she states occurred three years ago, shortly after Framton's sister left the town (225). Framton cannot imagine tragedy striking such a calm, country town, but nevertheless listens intently to Vera's story.

Vera points to a large, open, French-Style window in the room and remarks how odd it is to keep it open on such a warm October afternoon. Curious, Framton asks whether the window relates at all to the tragedy. It does. Vera explains how three years ago her aunt's husband and two young brothers exited through that window to go snipe-shooting. That summer was especially rainy, and all three of the men drowned in a "bog" while on their hunt (226). Tragically, nobody recovered the bodies; since that day, her aunt has kept the window open during the evening, ever-hopeful that her husband and brothers will one day return, hunting dog in tow, and walk back in through the window. Vera recounts the memories her aunt shared of the hunting trio: Mr. Stapleton's white raincoat slung over his arm; the sound of her younger brother, [Ronnie](#), teasingly singing to her "Bertie, why do you bound?" (226.) Vera finishes the tragic tale by confessing that on occasion she gets an eerie feeling that the men will actually appear at the window.

Just as Vera finishes her story, Mrs. Stapleton enters. She immediately apologizes for the open window and explains that she's left it open for her husband and brothers who should soon return from shooting. She expects they'll dirty her floors with their muddy shoes. Paying very little attention to her guest, Mrs. Stapleton continues to talk about shooting, lamenting how few snipe there are this season and expressing hope that winter will bring a healthy supply of ducks.

Framton listens, aghast at the grimness of the situation. He attempts to shift the conversation away from the hunting expedition, but Mrs. Stapleton cannot be redirected, frequently looking expectantly out the open window as she prattles on about hunting. In a final desperate attempt to shift the conversation, Framton explains the trouble he's been having with his nerves. Mrs. Stapleton cannot contain her yawn as Framton details the differing medical opinions regarding the proper diet for a man in need of a "nerve cure" (225).

Suddenly, Mrs. Stapleton jumps to attention and excitedly remarks that the hunting party has finally returned. Unbelievably, Framton looks to Vera, expecting to share with her a look of pity at the depth of Mrs. Stapleton's delusions. But Vera does not return his gaze. Instead, she looks out, horrified, onto the lawn. Framton quickly turns towards the window and notices the silhouettes of three men, each armed, walking towards the house. One of them has a white coat draped over his arm; following just behind is the silhouette of a small hunting spaniel. The men enter the house and one of them sings out "Bertie why do you bound?"

At that moment, Framton grabs his belongings and bolts out of the house, narrowly escaping a collision with a passing cyclist on the street.

One of the men, presumably Mr. Stapleton, asks Mrs. Stapleton about Framton's quick exit. She explains that the fleeing man is named Mr. Nuttel and wonders why he looked as though "he had seen a ghost" (227).

Just then, Vera interjects that it must have been the dog that frightened Framton. She then tells a short, extravagant story detailing Framton's supposed deep phobia of dogs stemming from an awful incident in which a pack of dogs chased him through a South Asian cemetery and forced him to hide away all night in a freshly-dug grave.

Analysis

The story has a tripartite structure: the first part beginning with the conversation between Vera and Framton, the second with the entrance of the aunt, and the third with the return of the hunting party (Peltzie 703). Saki employs flashback to divide these three parts, interrupting the present with a story-within-a-story inspired by Vera's imagined past. Like many of Saki's stories, "[The Open Window](#)" features a surprise ending when the reader discovers that Vera, whose name signifies *veracity* (i.e. truth), is ironically anything but truthful (Marcus 4).

Just as Vera tricks Framton, so Saki tricks readers by leading them to believe that Vera is a credible storyteller. He does this in part by making Vera a young girl. In Saki's time it was rare for a woman to be portrayed as "cunning" or "conniving" (Gibson 170-171). Rather, women and girls were frequently cast as the more trustworthy characters, whereas men and boys were the rascals. By casting the troublemaker as female in his story, Saki counters stereotypes about the proper way for young women to behave (Gibson 161).

Though this story does cast a girl as troublemaker, Vera's brand of troublemaking is distinct from that of Saki's male characters in other stories. She relies on her imagination to execute pranks whereas Saki's boy characters usually rely on destruction or aggression (Byrne 195). Saki's characterization of Vera also provides some clues to the careful reader about Vera's true nature. Chief among them is his characterization of Vera as a storyteller whose specialty is "[r]omance at short notice" (Saki 227; Gibson 159). Critics have often understood Vera to be a representation of Saki himself and a "personification of narrative 'authority'" (Gibson 159).

Vera is also an important character in "The Open Window" because she introduces childhood, a theme common in many of Saki's stories. Saki frequently portrays childhood as an unfortunate state of children being trapped in a boring, adult world. This perspective stems, in part, from H.H. Munro's own upbringing. Like many of Saki's children, Vera is under the watch of the aunt, an imposing figure from whom she desires escape (and achieves it through imaginative storytelling and trickery). The window is a representation of this desire to escape. It is a symbolic window to a different world through which Vera can travel into an alternate reality entirely of her own making. In this way, Vera's tall tales are a means of escapism from life in the boring, adult world.

Saki's stories frequently satirize and subvert the order of the Edwardian upper-middle class world of which H.H. Munro was a part. In "The Open Window" he does this by troubling and transforming the "rural" and calm setting of the formal house visit. Vera's story imbues the otherwise mannered and bourgeois scene with a grim tale of death and delusion. The tale becomes darker still when the aunt enters because Saki continues to describe the setting as a cheerful one even amidst the aunt's clear and tragic misunderstanding. Using words like "bustled," "whirl," and "cheerfully," Saki subverts the traditional setting of the Edwardian sitting room with the grotesque. This transformation is necessary to liven up the boring and mundane life in Edwardian society.