

## **The Open Window**

### **The Author**

Saki is the pseudonym of Hector Hugh Munro ( 1870-1916). Saki was born in Burma and brought up in North Devon by two aunts. Quite a number of his short-stories are set in India, as in the Open Window. In the days of Saki, India and Burma were part of the British Empire. India became independent in 1947 and Burma in 1948.

"The Open Window" is Saki's most popular short story. It was first collected in *Beasts and Super-Beasts* in 1914. Saki's wit is at the height of its power in this story of a spontaneous practical joke played upon a visiting stranger. The practical joke recurs in many of Saki's stories, but "The Open Window" is perhaps his most successful and best known example of the type. Saki dramatizes here the conflict between reality and imagination, demonstrating how difficult it can be to distinguish between them. Not only does the unfortunate Mr. Nuttel fall victim to the story's joke, but so does the reader. The reader is at first inclined to laugh at Nuttel for being so gullible. However, the reader, too, has been taken in by Saki's story and must come to the realization that he or she is also inclined to believe a well-told and interesting tale.

### **Literary appreciation.**

**A twist:** an unexpected change or development, very often at the end of a short story.

**A surprise ending:** an ending that comes as a shock to the reader

**A clue:** an indication, that properly interpreted, may lead to a full understanding of something or the discovery of something hidden.

**Irony:** from the Greek 'dissimulation'. A technique by which the writer intends his meaning to be understood differently from what he overtly says.

**Short-story:** a relatively brief invented prose narrative that typically deals with a limited group of characters involved in a single action, usually aims at unity of effect, and often concentrates on the creation of mood rather than the telling of a story.

### **The characters**

**Vera:** She is only known through her character and age. 15 years old: adolescence/childhood: as she is still young she might not realize what harm she is doing. Moreover a world of fantasy and reality intermingles in her mind. Rebellion against the world of adults ( she wants to be nasty to a rather boring man who only thought of his nerves).

**Mr. Nuttel:** He is only known through his weak nerves. He is ill-at-ease and formal from the start. His imagination misled him ( also his broken nerves): the aunt was always looking at the open window or not paying attention to them "a yawn": he only interpreted it as a lack of interest for what was taking place in the room; for him. Mr Nuttel " shivered" with fear; he finds the story " ghastly".

**Mrs. Sappleton:** Not much is known about her. First, she is seen through Vera's story and imagination and then through Mr. Nuttel's eyes, who thinks that she is mentally deranged. She seems to have an obsession ( mad people do have some!) She immediately talks about the window and the return of her husband and brothers and she keeps looking at the same window.

### **The trap.**

Vera's devilish trap: She immediately sees that Mr Nuttel is going to be an easy victim/prey since he is suffering from nervous breakdown and is here to cure his nerves. Furthermore, she makes sure that he is a perfect stranger and doesn't know her aunt

She gives precise details about the tragedy ( the spaniel and the song, which will be used at the end of the short story to convince Mr Nuttel of its veracity)

She knows how to create the right atmosphere " *when she judged that they had sufficient silent communion*". It means that the atmosphere got tense enough so that Mr Nuttel had become ill-at-ease. "*she judged*" means that she was in command; she was the boss of the

person in charge " *she broke off with a little shudder. It was a relief to Framton when the aunt bustled in...* "

Mrs Sappleton's words when she appears confirms her derangement. For Mr Nuttel she's definitely mad.

### **Irony.**

**Verbal irony:** saying what one does not mean. The meaning may be contrary to the words ( "oh, you're on time this morning" to someone who is always late)

**Situational irony:** the situation described does not correspond to reality or is in contrast what should happen or has happened.

**Situational irony:** The whole story is built on situational irony. The reader, like Mr Nuttel believes in Vera's story till the end; the reader is misled, deceived. He/she doesn't know what has actually happened until the end. The situation becomes ironical in retrospect when the reader actually understood what has really happened. " *I hope Vera has been amusing you*" (in fact Mr Nuttel is not amused) " *The doctors agree in ordering complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise*". In fact the reverse is going to take place. " *One would think he had seen a ghost*". The ghosts were real people. Moreover Mrs Sappleton was not aware at all of what was really happening.

### **Verbal irony:**

" *silent communion*"; Between Vera and Mr Nuttel, there is in fact no communion. Mr Nuttel is ill-at-ease and would like to break that " communion". " *She has been very interesting*" Mr Nuttel says. In fact he means that he learnt something interesting about her, about her supposedly madness. " *coincidence*". Here the irony comes from the author/narrator.