The Open Window

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SAKI

Saki was a British author known for his sardonic wit and frequent satire of social pretension. Born to an Inspector General of the Burma police in 1870, Saki lived in Asia until his mother's death in 1872. The two-year-old Saki and his siblings were then sent to live in England with their strict grandmother and aunts—figures who, many scholars assert, later served as inspiration for various authority figures in Saki's writing. Saki briefly followed in his father's footsteps by joining the Imperial Police of Burma, but illness forced him to return to England. He then began to pursue a career as a journalist and political satirist in London, and served as a foreign correspondent in Russia, the Balkans, and France. His first book, a history titled *The Rise of the Russian Empire*, was unsuccessful. He soon found recognition, however, as a prolific writer of darkly comic short stories, many of which targeted the sensibilities and customs of the British upper class. At 43, Munro—by then a successful author—voluntarily enlisted as a soldier in World War I. He was killed in action by a German sniper in France in 1916. His last words were widely reported to be, "Put that bloody cigarette out!"

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Saki wrote "The Open Window" during the Edwardian period in England, roughly corresponding to the reign of King Edward VII from 1901 to 1910, but often extended to include the 1890s to the start of World War I. The new millennium brought with it a relaxing of much of the rigidity of the prior Victorian era as well as the increased power of the working class and women in society. Though published shortly before World War I, "The Open Window" also eerily foreshadows the conflict with imagery of men leaving for and returning from war.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Saki's mastery of the short story has drawn comparisons to American authors O. Henry and Dorothy Parker, both known for their concise, biting wit. Like Saki, O. Henry frequently employed twist endings in his short stories, the most famous being "The Gift of the Magi." Parker, herself a recipient of the "O. Henry Award" in 1929 for her story "Big Blonde," often satirized high society and prejudice in her fiction, poetry, and essays. With its focus on the British upper crust, country homes, governesses, and manners, Saki's work also often evokes that of Irish author Oscar Wilde, particularly Wilde's farcical play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. This, much like "The Open Window", mocks the strict social customs of society and suggests the triviality of propriety.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Open Window
- **When Written:** 1914
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1914
- **Literary Period:** Edwardian
- **Genre:** Short story
- **Setting:** An English country house in the early twentieth century
- **Climax:** Thinking he is seeing ghosts enter the Sappleton home through an open window, Framton Nuttel runs away in horror, much to the confusion of his host.
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Nom de Plume. The exact origin of the pen name Saki remains up for debate. It may be in reference to an ancient Persian poem, or a South American monkey of same name.

Private Life. Saki never married and is believed to have been gay. Because homosexuality was considered a crime in Britain at the time, he was forced to keep this part of his identity hidden.

PLOT SUMMARY

Framton Nuttel is visiting the quiet English countryside in the hope of curing his nerves. Upon arriving at Mrs. Sappleton's home, he is greeted by her self-assured 15-year-old niece named Vera. Mr. Nuttel searches in vain for the proper greeting for a teenage girl, while privately lamenting that these meetings with strangers, arranged by his sister, likely won't do him any good. Vera proceeds to ask her guest about his knowledge of the area and learns that Mr. Nuttel knows "next to nothing" about her aunt. Vera then points out a large, **open window**, and launches into a story about Mrs. Sappleton's "great tragedy."

Vera tells Mr. Nuttel that three years ago Mrs. Sappleton's husband, two brothers, and spaniel left through that window for a hunting trip, during which they were all "engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog." Vera includes specific details about the outing that all ground her tale, such as the white raincoat one man was wearing and how her uncle Ronnie sang "Bertie, why do you bound?" to tease his sister. Now, Vera says, her aunt keeps the window open because she believes the men will still

come home. Vera adds that on quiet evenings, she gets a "creepy feeling" that the dead men will indeed walk through the window.

Just then Mrs. Sappleton enters the room, much to Mr. Nuttel's relief, and asks her guest whether Vera has been amusing him. She proceeds to apologize for the open window, remarking that her husband and brothers enter the house that way after hunting trips to avoid dirtying the carpet. Mr. Nuttel grows horrified by her cheerful rambling about hunting, and attempts to change the subject by discussing his illness and various cures. He notices that Mrs. Sappleton's eyes keep wandering toward the window, and considers it an "unfortunate coincidence" to have visited on such a tragic anniversary. Mrs. Sappleton barely stifles a yawn before "brightening to attention" to something outside.

Mrs. Sappleton excitedly remarks that her brother and husband have arrived just in time for tea. For a moment Mr. Nuttel pities her delusion, before catching a look of terror on Vera's face. Turning to look out the window himself, he sees three men and a dog walking across the yard, one with a white raincoat slung over his arm and another singing "Bertie, why do you bound?"—just as in Vera's story. Terrified, Mr. Nuttel sprints out of the house and down the driveway.

The men enter the home and the one with the white coat asks Mrs. Sappleton who the man running past was. She responds that he was a "most extraordinary gentleman," who left without saying goodbye, in such a hurry that "one would think he had seen a ghost."

Immediately Vera explains that Mr. Nuttel ran off because of the spaniel, adding that he is scared of dogs due to a traumatic incident in India. The story concludes with the line, "romance at short notice was her specialty."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Framton Nuttel – A perpetually anxious gentleman sent to the English countryside to soothe his nerves. Mr. Nuttel has arrived at the Sappleton home following a letter of introduction from his sister, but is not enthused about the prospect of conversing with total strangers. His behavior is largely shaped by expectations of social etiquette, and he is easily manipulated by Vera's story about the deaths of her aunt's husband and brothers. Upon the return of Mrs. Sappleton's male relatives to the house, Mr. Nuttel dashes away without a word of explanation or apology—all his gentlemanly pretensions cast aside in the face of apparent horror.

Vera Sappleton – Fifteen-year-old Vera greets Mr. Nuttel upon his arrival to the Sappleton home and spins the tragic tale that sends him running away. Immediately described as "very self-possessed," Vera is an observant, clever, and above all imaginative young woman who handily fools the adults around her with "romance on short notice." Vera's name comes from the Latin for truth, and her innocent demeanor makes her tales all the more convincing.

Mrs. Sappleton – Vera's aunt and the lady of the Sappleton home. Though she appears to be somewhat aware of Vera's penchant for storytelling, Mrs. Sappleton nevertheless fails to detect the prank her niece has pulled on the unsuspecting Mr. Nuttel. Mrs. Sappleton nearly arrives at the truth of the matter, commenting after Mr. Nuttel's hasty exit that her guest looked as though he'd seen a ghost.

Framton Nuttel's sister – Though she never appears in the story, Mr. Nuttel's sister is the reason he is at the Sappleton home to begin with. Fearing her brother would spend his restorative time in the country moping, she writes letters of introduction to acquaintances she made while working at a local rectory a few years prior, remarking that "some" of these people were nice.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Ronnie – Mrs. Sappleton's youngest brother, whom Vera says always sings "Bertie, why do you bound?" He sings this upon returning from his hunting trip, terrifying Mr. Nuttel.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE ABSURDITY OF ETIQUETTE

"The Open Window"—Saki's tale of the anxious Framton Nuttel's ill-fated encounter with the precocious young storyteller Vera in the English countryside—is, ultimately, a satire of excessive decorum. Saki wrote the story during the Edwardian Era (1901-1914), when British social mores were beginning to loosen. In the story, Saki positions the excessive social graces of the previous period as shallow and arbitrary, but also as actions that, ironically, allow for rudeness and deception.

In "The Open Window" etiquette is the enemy of candor. Rigid social expectations lead to stilted, awkward conversations, as characters must say what is proper rather than what they actually feel. For example, Mr. Nuttel cannot simply offer a sincere greeting or compliment to Vera upon his arrival at the Sappleton home. Instead, he must navigate the overly-complicated task of saying "the correct something which should duly flatter the niece of the moment without unduly

discounting the aunt that was to come." The result is silence: concern over saying the right thing results in Mr. Nuttel unable to think of anything to say at all. Saki further lampoons societal norms of conversation by writing that Vera only continued speaking after judging that she and Mr. Nuttel "had had sufficient silent communion."

Etiquette also manifests as a form of insincerity. Mr. Nuttel's sister has written letters of introduction to locals she met while living in the countryside, in the hopes that meeting with them will help assuage her brother's anxiety. Yet despite asking these people for what is essentially a favor, she cannot bring herself to characterize them all favorably; she says to her brother that only "some of them, as far as I can remember, were quite nice." With his sister having already written letters, propriety dictates that Mr. Nuttel visit certain homes despite having no meaningful connection to their occupants. Mr. Nuttel proceeds with these social callings despite his—it turns out warranted—doubts that his "formal visits on a succession of total strangers would do much towards helping to cure his nerves."

Mr. Nuttel feeling obliged to visit strangers, and those strangers feeling obliged to host him, creating the opportunity for (and perhaps ensuring) awkwardness hidden behind a veil of politeness. Saki then further points out the ridiculousness of the situation by showing how these interactions between utter strangers also create the opportunity for deception. Upon learning that the man she has been tasked with greeting is clueless about her family, Vera entertains herself by spinning a tale about her aunt's tragic history—subverting expectations of propriety to satisfy her own decidedly improper ends.

Preoccupation with etiquette not only allows Vera to get away with her lies, but also results in Mr. Nuttel being made a fool of. His head spinning with Vera's story about the deaths of her male relatives, Mr. Nuttel becomes terrified upon seeing "ghosts" return to the Sappleton home and flees "without a word of good-bye or apology" (and also nearly collides with an innocent cyclist in the process). A situation spawned by decorum has ironically resulted in the anxious Mr. Nuttel coming across as a rude, and as such implies that the original social mores governing politeness and decorum are themselves hollow and absurd.

FICTION AND PERSPECTIVE

"The Open Window" uses its story-within-a-story structure to explore the interplay of truth and imagination. Whether viewed as a cruel prank or an enjoyable practical joke, the stories that Vera makes up in "The Open Window" control the perspectives of everyone around her.

Saki mines comedy from contradicting perspectives, as Vera's story results in a farcical disconnect between Mr. Nuttel's experience of the world and Mrs. Sappleton's. Based on Vera's story, Mr. Nuttel believes Mrs. Sappleton's male relatives to have been killed on a hunting trip three years ago, and so Mr. Nuttel finds it "purely horrible" to hear Mrs. Sappleton ramble "cheerfully" on about how the men will soon return. Such light topics are hardly cause for horror, unless one believes (as Mr. Nuttel does) their speaker to be delusional with grief.

On a similar note, Mr. Nuttel's subsequent attempt to steer the conversation in a "less ghastly" direction by talking about his personal ailments is a nicety that appears deeply strange to Mrs. Sappleton. Lacking the fiction that shapes Mr. Nuttel's perspective of their meeting, Mrs. Sappleton cannot understand why her guest "could only talk about his illnesses" and why he runs away from the home when her relatives arrive. She instead perceives Mr. Nuttel to simply be a "most extraordinary man"—which is a kind of polite code for what she actually means: that she thinks he's crazy. Mrs. Sappleton nearly arrives at the truth of the matter when she says of Mr. Nuttel's hasty exit, "One would think he had seen a ghost." The irony is she has no idea that, in Mr. Nuttel's mind, this is precisely what happened.

Saki's story also makes frequent use both situational and dramatic irony: not only does Vera fool her audience, but "The Open Window" fools its readers as well. At first, the reader has no concrete reason to question Mr. Nuttel's perception of events nor to disbelieve Vera's story. In fact, Mr. Nuttel is initially presented as an observant man, noting—correctly—that "an undefinable something" about the Sappleton home "seemed to suggest masculine habitation." By presenting much of "The Open Window" from Mr. Nuttel's perspective, Saki puts the reader in the same shoes as his gullible protagonist. And to Mr. Nuttel, Vera appears "falteringly human" and has a look of "dazed horror in her eyes" as the men return from their outing—all evidence that her ghostly story must be true. The specificity and quickness of Vera's tale further lend it an air of authenticity.

However satirical "The Open Window" may be, it is only upon reaching the end of the story—when Vera invents a reason for Mr. Nuttel's frantic exit—that the reader can know for certain that Vera has been lying all along. Saki's prose is restrained in its mockery, with any authorial smirk becoming apparent only after the reader gets to the end of the tale. This shift in perspective changes the entire tone of the story; elements that initially come across as sinister become comedic through dramatic irony (that is, knowing something the characters do not). The delusional figure in the story also shifts from being Mrs. Sappleton to Mr. Nuttel.

As the author of the internal tale, Vera serves as a sort of stand-in for Saki himself (who not coincidentally grew up in an English country house with his aunts). "The Open Window" thus asserts the ability of fiction to alter one's perception of the world, and the tale is ultimately a testament to the power of

storytelling.

THE ROMANCE OF HYPOCHONDRIA

In the story of Mr. Nuttel going to the country to search for the "nerve cure" for his anxieties, Saki lampoons not just the strict etiquette of the previous (Victorian) era, but also its tendency to romanticize the English countryside, tragedy, and illness.

The exact nature of Mr. Nuttel's condition is never specified beyond being a vague issue of "nerves." His prescription for "complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise" reads more like justification for taking a vacation. Mr. Nuttel's anxieties seem all the more inconsequential when positioned in comparison to Mrs. Sappleton's "great tragedy" (that is, the alleged death of her husband, brothers, and dog in a bizarre accident). The fact that Vera concocts such a macabre tale in response to Mr. Nuttel's arrival suggests that she, for one, certainly does not take his ailment, nor his prescription for rest and relaxation, seriously.

Romanticizing illness results in romanticizing its cure. Mr. Nuttel is shocked by Vera's story in part because he assumes the countryside to be the restorative idyll of stereotype, noting, "in this restful country spot tragedies seemed out of place." Yet in the end the countryside is neither restful nor horrifying; to a young girl starved for entertainment, it is simply boring.

Saki's most scathing indictment of Mr. Nuttel's frailty comes when, in his attempts "to turn the talk on to a less ghastly topic" with Mrs. Sappleton, he begins discussing his illness. Saki describes Mr. Nuttel as laboring "under the tolerably wide-spread delusion that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one's ailments and infirmities, their cause and cure." The obviously bored Mrs. Sappleton can barely stifle her yawn while listening to Mr. Nuttel. By employing the phrase "tolerably wide-spread" Saki suggests that Mr. Nuttel's delusion is not just his own, and that, rather, it spreads across society. Mr. Nuttel, then, is but a stand-in for the legions of self-absorbed hypochondriacs (that is, people who are paranoid about or preoccupied with their own health) across British society—some of whom may be reading Saki's words, and all of whom he is mocking.

In the story, Saki satirizes not only preoccupation with one's own delicateness but also fascination with tragedy, as, like Mr. Nuttel, contemporary readers may have been too quick to believe Vera's tale of gothic horror. In "The Open Window," "nerves" are nothing more than self-absorbed hypochondria, and tragic romance is spun from the musings of a bored teenage girl. The story thus suggests that the maladies of the upper class—both "nerves" and overexcited "Romantic" imaginations—may simply be the result of having too much time on their hands.

INNOCENCE AND GUILE

Saki subverts expectations of naiveté, as the young, too-easily-dismissed Vera handily manipulates the adults around her. In "The Open Window," age does not necessarily confer wisdom, and a childish demeanor can mask audacious cunning.

In the opening line of the story, Mr. Nuttel immediately observes that Vera is a "very self-possessed young lady," yet nevertheless fails to detect her prank. This is in large part because, in keeping with her self-possession, Vera knows how to play the role of an innocent, nonthreatening girl. Vera tempers her own significance from the moment she meets Mr. Nuttel, saying, "My aunt will be down presently ... in the meantime you must try and put up with me." By presenting herself as inconsequential, she is able to avert suspicion of anything she subsequently says.

Despite how she may present herself, however, Vera is clearly more perceptive than Mr. Nuttel. While the latter is consumed with searching for the proper thing to say and constantly worrying about his own infirmities, Vera is sizing up her guest. Her delicate prying—"Then you know practically nothing about my aunt?"—goes unnoticed by Mr. Nuttel, yet grants Vera the permission she needs to make up any history she desires.

The quickness and specificity of Vera's ghost story further evidences her keen knack for observation. Her detailed description of her uncles means she must have noted the exact configuration of men heading out hunting earlier in the day. Details such as the "white waterproof coat over" an uncle's arm, the presence of a spaniel, and her uncle singing "Bertie, why do you bound?" ground her story in reality. Her acting skills are well-practiced as well, as she is able to convince Mr. Nuttel that she is genuinely terrified upon the return of her uncles. That, or he just is not suspecting a young girl to so brazenly lie to his face; it appears Mr. Nuttel would rather believe ghosts have entered the Sappleton house than that a 15-year-old girl could have fooled him.

"The Open Window" does not condemn Vera for her deception. On the contrary, Saki presents her as remarkably quick-thinking and imaginative young woman, simply amusing herself while surrounded by less observant adults in the stiflingly proper English countryside. Vera's name, in fact, comes from the Latin for truth. While her stories are anything but, Saki suggests that her ability to reveal the artifice of certain social situations is, in itself, an act of honesty.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE OPEN WINDOW

The open window is the main set piece of Vera's story, literally framing her uncles' return for the characters inside the Sappleton home. Though each character sees the same thing when looking through the window, what this image means changes depending on their perspective. For Mrs. Sappleton, who knows her husband and brothers will soon be returning from a hunting trip, seeing the men through the window is exciting. To Mr. Nuttel, who believes these men are dead, it is terrifying. The open window thus represents the power of storytelling to shape one's view of the world outside.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Knopf edition of *Selected Stories* published in 2017.

The Open Window Quotes

Framton Nuttel endeavoured to say the correct something which should duly flatter the niece of the moment without unduly discounting the aunt that was to come. Privately he doubted more than ever whether these formal visits on a succession of total strangers would do much towards helping the nerve cure which he was supposed to be undergoing.

Related Characters: Vera Sappleton, Framton Nuttel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Nuttel is at a loss for words when Vera greets him upon his arrival at the Sappleton home. He is presented as a man greatly concerned with social decorum, which here appears complicated to the point of absurdity—in seeking to say the "correct something," he ends up saying nothing at all, thus appearing rude through too much politeness. These lines also establish Mr. Nuttel's anxiousness and the reason for his visit; he has gone to the country because of an ailment of "nerves," his sister has written ahead to strangers in the area, and now Mr. Nuttel is obligated to visit these people. Knowing he is seeking a nerve cure, the decidedly unrelaxing experience he is about to have becomes all the more comedic—or, perhaps, cruel.

Poor aunt always thinks that they will come back some day, they and the little brown spaniel that was lost with them, and walk in at that window just as they used to do. That is why the window is kept open every evening till it is quite dusk. ... Do you know, sometimes on still, quiet evenings like this, I almost get a creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window - "

Related Characters: Vera Sappleton (speaker), Mrs. Sappleton, Framton Nuttel

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

Vera's elaborate explanation for the open window ends with an element of horror. Knowing full well that her uncles are not dead, and in fact will be returning through the open window later that afternoon, Vera sets the stage to frighten Mr. Nuttel. She includes specific details as well, like the little brown spaniel, to make her story seem more reliable, thoroughly convincing Mr. Nuttel (who has no reason to disbelieve the seemingly innocent Vera) that her fiction is fact. He, along with the reader, does not know the true fate of Vera's uncles, and as such her words create a sense of tension and foreboding.

She rattled on cheerfully about the shooting and the scarcity of birds, and the prospects for duck in the winter. To Framton it was all purely horrible.

Related Characters: Mrs. Sappleton, Framton Nuttel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

After telling Mr. Nuttel that her husband and brothers are out hunting, Mrs. Sappleton begins to chat lightheartedly about into the banalities of shooting birds. These lines further establish the arbitrariness of propriety and the power of perspective: at first, Mrs. Sappleton's ramblings seem to confirm Vera's story that her aunt is delusional and thinks that her dead relatives will return. Believing the men to have been killed in a hunting accident, Mr. Nuttel considers Mrs. Sappleton's cheerful tone to be decidedly

improper and even horrifying. When the reader realizes that Vera has lied, however, Mr. Nuttel becomes the character who is actually behaving like a delusional fool.

"The doctors agree in ordering me complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise," announced Framton, who laboured under the tolerably wide-spread delusion that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one's ailments and infirmities, their cause and cure.

Related Characters: Framton Nuttel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

Horrified by Mrs. Sappleton's remarks about hunting and her (supposedly dead) family members, Mr. Nuttel attempts to change the subject. His chosen topic, however, is one of little interest to anyone besides himself: his ailment of "nerves" and the suggested cure that has brought him to the country. Saki is mocking self-absorbed hypochondria (that is, preoccupation with or paranoia about one's health), something he notes is rampant across "proper" society at the time. Furthermore, if Mrs. Sappleton truly was suffering from delusions about her dead relatives, then a discussion of Mr. Nuttel's comparatively minor ailments would ring especially inappropriate. Finally, in light of the story's ending (when Mr. Nuttel experiences great "mental excitement" and undertakes "violent physical exercise"), the doctor's suggested cure seems all the more humorous.

In the deepening twilight three figures were walking across the lawn towards the window; they all carried guns under their arms, and one of them was additionally burdened with a white coat hung over his shoulders. A tired brown spaniel kept close at their heels. Noiselessly they neared the house, and then a hoarse young voice chanted out of the dusk: "I said, Bertie, why do you bound?"

Related Characters: Ronnie, Framton Nuttel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Sappleton's brothers and husband walk towards the house following their day of hunting, much to the delight of Mrs. Sappleton and fear of Mr. Nuttel. Their configuration corresponds exactly to Vera's story, which makes Mr. Nuttel truly believe he is seeing a group of ghosts. Saki's language builds the horror of the moment, noting the silence of the men's approach, the darkness of the night, and the hoarseness of the voice. Only upon knowing that the men are in fact not dead does Mr. Nuttel's utter terror become comedic. Overall this scene cleverly shows how one's perspective can entirely change the apparent reality of an event: the scene in general is rather banal, but to Mrs. Sappleton it is a relief, to Mr. Nuttel it is horrifying, and to Vera it is presumably quite amusing.

"A most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel," said Mrs. Sappleton; "could only talk about his illnesses, and dashed off without a word of good-bye or apology when you arrived. One would think he had seen a ghost."

Related Characters: Mrs. Sappleton (speaker), Framton Nuttel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Sappleton attempts to explains to her brothers and husband who Mr. Nuttel—the man they saw running from the house—was. She notes that his departure was odd and rude, though she uses "most extraordinary" essentially as a euphemism for this judgment. In his terror, Mr. Nuttel abandoned the proprieties that had guided his actions to this point, abruptly leaving his host without any sort of farewell, in the process seeming impolite and even insane. Ironically, Mrs. Sappleton says exactly why he left without realizing that she has arrived at the truth of the matter—he thought he *had* "seen a ghost." None of the adults in the story ever fully grasp what is going on.

Romance at short notice was her speciality.

Related Characters: Vera Sappleton

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

Only in the final line of Saki's story do we get an explanation of Vera's behavior—that is, that she is deeply imaginative, quick-thinking, and prone to telling stories. "At short notice" she has been able to entirely fool the gullible Mr. Nuttel and get away with it, leaving her relatives to assume that he must be extremely rude or even insane. This pithy line thus explains everything that came before and suggests that Vera has been getting away with this kind of tale-telling for some time. Saki also takes a dig at the seriousness of traditional romantic tales by presenting them as stories that can be crafted at the drop of a hat by a bored teenage girl.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE OPEN WINDOW

Vera, a "self-possessed" young woman, greets Framton Nuttel, who has just arrived at her house. Vera says that her aunt will be down soon to see Mr. Nuttel, and that in the meantime he will have to "put up with" Vera.

Vera's immediate confidence foreshadows her ability to control the adults around her. Her calculated self-deprecation in this moment is meant to reduce her importance in her guest's eyes.

Mr. Nuttel attempts to think of an appropriate greeting to flatter Vera without going so far as to belittle her aunt, Mrs. Sappleton. He ends up saying nothing.

Social propriety is overly complicated and absurd; Mr. Nuttel is so concerned with saying the right thing that he can think of nothing to say.

Privately, Mr. Nuttel doubts whether these visits with strangers, prearranged by his sister to make sure he does not mope in the countryside, will do any good for his anxiety. He further wonders about his sister's comment that only "some" of the people to him he is being introduced are "nice."

Mr. Nuttel's lack of interest in, and judgment of, the people to whom his sister has written reflects the shallowness and insincerity of certain social customs.

After "sufficient silent communion" has elapsed, Vera asks Mr. Nuttel about his knowledge of the area. Mr. Nuttel replies that he knows next to nothing about Mrs. Sappleton, and that his sister is the one who gave him letters of introduction.

Propriety continues to lead to stilted, unnatural social interactions. Vera uses this to her advantage as she pries into Mr. Nuttel's knowledge of the area, playing the role of polite hostess in order to gauge how much fiction she can get away with later.

Vera tells Mr. Nuttel that Mrs. Sappleton's "great tragedy" happened three years prior, after Mr. Nuttel's sister's time in the country. Mr. Nuttel feels that any tragedy would be out of place in such a restful location.

Mr. Nuttel's romantic preconceptions about country life are incompatible with tragedy. Vera artfully positions this "tragedy" as having taken place after Mr. Nuttel's sister had left, which explains why he never heard about it.

Vera points out a large **open window**, commenting that Mr. Nuttel may wonder why it has been left open on an October afternoon. She proceeds to tell her guest that three years ago, her aunt's husband and brothers, along with their spaniel, went out through the window to go shooting. One man wore a white waterproof coat. They were "engulfed by a treacherous bog" on the trip and died. She laments that the conditions that summer were very wet.

This is the first mention of the titular open window, which Vera transforms from a mundane household object into a centerpiece of tragedy. Her use of specific details makes her story more believable. The men's manner of death is so absurd, however, as to be farcical; Saki is satirizing elements of traditional tragic romances.

Mr. Nuttel notes that Vera's voice has become less self-assured, and instead is "falteringly human." She continues, saying that her aunt believes the men will still return some day, her younger brother Ronnie singing "Bertie, why do you bound?" to tease her, and that is why the window is kept open. On quiet nights, Vera herself fears that the dead men will walk through the window.

Mr. Nuttel is convinced by Vera, who clearly knows how to act like an innocent young girl. She plays up her own terror to further unnerve her guest, and her suggestion of the men returning through the window adds suspense to the scene.

Mrs. Sappleton enters the room, much to Mr. Nuttel's relief, and asks her guest if Vera has been amusing him. Mrs. Sappleton apologizes to Mr. Nuttel for the open window, remarking that her husband and brothers enter the house that way to avoid dirtying the carpet. Mr. Nuttel is horrified as she rambles on about hunting, and he notices that her eyes keep wandering toward the window. He considers it an "unfortunate coincidence" to have visited on such a tragic anniversary.

Mrs. Sappleton's entrance breaks the building tension. Her light demeanor sharply contrasts with Vera's story, while her preoccupation with the window makes her appear delusional to the newly-conned Mr. Nuttel. His pity for Mrs. Sappleton is ironic, given that he is the one being made a fool.

Mr. Nuttel attempts to change the subject by discussing the intricacies of his own ailments and prescriptions, laboring "under the tolerably widespread delusion that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one's ailments and infirmities, their cause and cure." Mrs. Sappleton barely stifles her yawn.

Saki mocks those who, like Mr. Nuttel, believe their ailments to be of interest to strangers. Even the proper, polite Mrs. Sappleton appears bored.

Mrs. Sappleton suddenly brightens to attention to something outside, and then excitedly remarks that her brother and husband have arrived just in time for tea. Mr. Nuttel pities her delusion, before catching a look of terror on Vera's face.

Mr. Nuttel has been completely taken in by Vera, and his condescending pity is quickly replaced by fear. Vera continues to act the part of a frightened, innocent girl.

Turning to look out the **window** himself, Mr. Nuttel sees three men and a dog walking across the yard, one with a white raincoat slung over his arm and another singing "Bertie, why do you bound?"—just as in Vera's story.

The inclusion of details from Vera's story make Mr. Nuttel think he truly is seeing a pack of ghosts. This scene is one of horror for Mr. Nuttel, relief for Mrs. Sappleton, and humor for the reader who knows the end of the tale.

Mr. Nuttel sprints out of the house and down the driveway in horror, causing a cyclist "to run into the hedge to avoid imminent collision."

The abruptness of Mr. Nuttel's departure contrasts with his earlier calculated propriety, and reveals the extent to which Vera has fooled him. His near run-in with a cyclist adds an element of farce to the scene.

The men enter the home, and the one with the white coat asks Mrs. Sappleton who the man running past was. She responds that he was a "most extraordinary gentleman," who left without saying goodbye, in such a hurry that "one would think he had seen a ghost."

It becomes clear that the men are not ghosts but alive and well. Mr. Nuttel's exit was thus rude and unnecessary. Mrs. Sappleton ironically says the truth of what happened without knowing it.

Immediately Vera explains that Mr. Nuttel ran off because of the spaniel, adding that he is scared of dogs due to a traumatic incident in India. The story concludes with the line, "romance at short notice was her specialty."

Any doubt about the veracity of Vera's earlier tale is dispelled by her eagerness to whip up a new one. The reader knows that this story about Mr. Nuttel is not true, and thus that Vera has been lying all along. Saki's final line cements Vera as a clever con artist, while also satirizing traditional notions of romance as weighty and serious.

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