

Epiphany in "A Little Cloud" by James Joyce

In James Joyce's short story *A Little Cloud*, the protagonist, Little Chandler, undergoes an epiphany—a sudden realization that profoundly alters his perception of his life. Throughout the story, Chandler is caught between admiration and envy as he reunites with his old friend, Ignatius Gallaher, who has found success as a journalist in London. The meeting stirs Chandler's long-suppressed literary ambitions, making him feel dissatisfied with his mundane life as a clerk in Dublin. He fantasizes about writing poetry and escaping the dull routine of his existence.

However, **his true moment of epiphany occurs in the final scene** when he returns home to his wife and child. As he struggles to care for his crying baby, he momentarily loses his temper, shouting at the child in frustration. His wife walks in and glares at him with hatred, making him feel an overwhelming sense of shame and failure. At that moment, he realizes that **his dreams of literary success and a more fulfilling life are unattainable**—he is **trapped** in the reality of his domestic responsibilities. Unlike Gallaher, he cannot escape Dublin or his circumstances.

This epiphany is tragic because it does not lead to change but rather to deeper entrapment. He sees, perhaps for the first time, the **full weight of his limitations**—his timidity, his lack of ambition, and his inability to break free from his monotonous life. Joyce masterfully captures this moment of realization, making it a defining characteristic of his style in *Dubliners*, where characters often experience epiphanies that reveal the futility of their desires rather than liberating them.

Epiphany in "The Postmaster" by Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore's short story *The Postmaster* presents a poignant epiphany through the character of Ratan, a young orphan girl who forms a deep emotional attachment to the postmaster, only to be abandoned by him in the end.

Throughout the story, Ratan serves the postmaster with great devotion, tending to his needs and cherishing the conversations they share about his family. Over time, she begins to see him as a father figure, or perhaps even more. When he falls ill, she nurses him with unwavering care, believing that their bond is something permanent. However, **her epiphany occurs when the postmaster announces that he is leaving the village for good.**

Ratan, in a rare moment of courage, asks if she can go with him. The postmaster laughs at the very idea, unaware of the **depth of her emotional investment**. It is at this moment that Ratan realizes the harsh truth—**their connection was never as meaningful to him as it was to her**. While she saw him as family, he saw her merely as a helpful servant.

This epiphany is **heartbreaking** because it shatters her innocent belief in relationships. Unlike the postmaster, who quickly moves on and consoles himself with philosophical musings about life's separations, **Ratan is left alone, still waiting, still hoping against reason**. She

embodies the **cruelty of unreciprocated love**, and her realization reflects the pain of those who invest deeply in people who do not return the same depth of feeling.

The Call of the Flying Fish – A Detailed Narration

A Child's Desire to Catch Flying Fish

Ta-k'a-an, a young Yami boy, was eager to join his father, Hsia-man Ta-k'a-an, on a fishing expedition to catch flying fish. After finishing his day at school, he ran home, excitedly asking his father, **"Yama, take me with you to catch flying fish in the ocean, please."** His father, however, ignored him as he was busy repairing the fishing net on the veranda in preparation for the night's fishing. The sun was setting, casting golden light over the village and ocean, but Ta-k'a-an remained focused on his desire to accompany his father.

Ta-k'a-an was not like other children who excelled in school. His school bag was more often soaked in seawater than filled with books. His sneakers were covered in dirty foam, and his uniform was stained with various colors. His body bore the greasy marks of daily adventures, and soap was a rare luxury in his home. His father, despite trying to provide for his family, prioritized purchasing salt for preserving the flying fish over buying soap.

As Ta-k'a-an sat near his father, he overheard the neighbors talking about their fishing experiences. One fisherman asked, **"Where did you catch so many flying fish last night?"** His father proudly responded, **"Not that many. Just two hundred and six fish in the Jiliseng area."** In contrast, another man complained about catching only thirty fish, expressing frustration over a poor catch.

Ta-k'a-an, determined and excited, **begged his father once again** to take him out to sea. His school bag was still slung over his shoulder, and his heart was full of hope. But his father dismissed him, saying, **"What would you come along for? You haven't done well in school. Stay home and do your homework."**

A Mother's Perspective

Ta-k'a-an's mother, who was dark-skinned and wrinkled from years of hard labor, defended her son. She reminded her husband that their child would sneak to the beach anyway, waiting behind a rock for his father's return. She suggested that he take the boy out just once so he could understand how difficult fishing truly was. However, his father remained unconvinced.

Still hopeful, Ta-k'a-an rolled up his short sleeves and showed off his small but growing muscles. He urged his father, **"Feel it—my muscle. Feel it, Yama!"** But his father shook his head and said, **"Strength alone is useless. You are a sixth grader, yet you still know nothing. Without an education, you will end up as a laborer, taking orders from others. You will be nothing but a worker for the Taiwanese."**

Ta-k'a-an's **heart sank**. Tears welled up in his eyes as he threw his school bag to the ground in frustration. He knew his father was disappointed in him, but school had always been difficult for him. The new words and lessons felt impossible to memorize, like **fighting an evil spirit**.

A Forbidden Curse

Desperate to be taken out to sea, Ta-k'a-an suddenly **made a bold and reckless statement**: “**If you don't take me out to sea, Yama, I will curse the flying fish!**”

At this, his father **froze in shock**. He turned toward his son with a fiery gaze, **filled with anger and fear**. Cursing the flying fish was a serious **tribal taboo**. The Yami people believed that flying fish were sacred, a gift from the heavens, and to curse them would bring misfortune. His father scolded him harshly, warning that if anyone in the tribe heard him, he would have to offer a great feast as an apology—a feast that required a pig, something they could not afford.

Neighbors, overhearing the conversation, gasped in disbelief. “**Oh, thoughtless child! How could you curse the flying fish? Do you want to bring disaster upon our tribe?**”

Realizing his mistake, **Ta-k'a-an quickly apologized** and continued to beg his father to take him along. His **persistence** was unusual, and his mother wondered if something had happened at school—perhaps he had been punished by his teacher.

A Dream Fulfilled

As the sun set, **the fishermen gathered at the shore**, preparing their boats. Some tied ropes for the oars, others sorted fishing nets, and a few simply smoked and chatted. The ocean air was filled with the scent of salt and fish, and the waves sparkled under the slanting light of the setting sun. The scene was mesmerizing, and for the Yami people, it was **a time of deep connection with their ancestors and traditions**.

Ta-k'a-an saw his uncle, Maran, preparing his boat. He **begged him to let him join the fishing trip**, flexing his muscles once again. His uncle, **more kind-hearted than his father**, allowed him to go but warned him not to fall asleep in the boat, as the **ocean spirits might capture his soul**.

Filled with **pure joy**, Ta-k'a-an leaped with excitement. His father, now unable to refuse, prepared him with **important survival rules** for the sea. **The moment he had been waiting for had arrived**.

The Journey at Sea

The boat gently rocked with the rhythm of the waves. Ta-k'a-an, experiencing his **first night at sea**, felt a deep **sense of peace and adventure**.

His father, amused by his excitement, **reminded him to concentrate on rowing.** But Ta-k'a-an couldn't help but admire **the vast night sky, filled with stars like the silver scales of flying fish.** In his native tongue, he whispered, **"The sky has so many eyes."**

However, his father **warned him not to point at the stars,** as the **spirits might notice him and steal his soul in his sleep.** Despite the warning, **Ta-k'a-an felt incredibly happy and proud** to be in the boat with his father.

His father then shared his regrets about not furthering his education when he was young. **"If I had continued studying, we wouldn't have to live like this,"** he confessed. He urged his son to do better in school, to study hard so he wouldn't end up laboring for the Taiwanese, always being ordered around. But Ta-k'a-an had his own dreams. **He saw his future in the ocean, not in school.**

Catching the Flying Fish

After **half an hour,** the net began **to fill with movement.** Ta-k'a-an held his breath in excitement as his father pointed out a **glimmering silver light** beneath the waves.

A flying fish leaped into the air, its black wings outstretched like a bird.

Ta-k'a-an **was in awe.** He **gently cradled the fish,** feeling its shimmering scales in his hands. It was the **legendary Black Wing,** the **king of the flying fish.**

At that moment, he **felt a deep connection to the ocean and his ancestors.** He **kissed the fish,** wrapped it in his uniform, and **whispered a promise to the sea:**

"One day, I will take my own boat and become a great fisherman—a true Yami hero."

Back to Reality

As dawn approached, his father decided to head back. But **Ta-k'a-an begged to cast the net one more time.** His father hesitated, knowing that Ta-k'a-an had **school the next day,** but eventually agreed.

Back on shore, the **villagers praised Ta-k'a-an** for his hard work. **For the first time, he felt a sense of pride and belonging.**

As they walked home, **his father reminded him once more to study hard.** **"You don't study to be important, but to have choices in life."**

The next day at school, **his happiness was shattered.**

His teacher **announced his grades:**

- Mathematics: **0**
- Chinese: **12**

- Science: 8
- Social Science: 32

The teacher **mocked him**, calling him “**Mr. Zero.**”

Ta-k’a-an sat alone on a rock near the beach, **watching the fishing boats disappear into the horizon**. He **crumpled the paper with his failing grades in his strong hands**.

As the sun sank into the sea, **two words echoed in his heart**:
“Flying fish... Zero...”

Lyrical vs. Epical Short Stories

A lyrical short story is one that focuses on emotions, atmosphere, and introspection rather than plot-driven action. It often contains poetic language, deep emotions, and a moment of personal realization or aesthetic beauty. Such stories emphasize mood, character psychology, and sensory details, creating a tone similar to that of poetry.

An epical short story, on the other hand, is more narrative-driven, resembling a condensed epic. It follows a clear progression of events, often featuring a protagonist facing challenges, moving towards a resolution, and experiencing significant transformations. While it may still include emotional depth, an epical story places greater emphasis on external action, conflict, and a structured narrative arc rather than internal musings.

Postmaster—Lyrical

From a lyrical perspective, *The Postmaster* by Rabindranath Tagore is a meditation on loneliness, fleeting human connections, and unfulfilled longing. The story is not driven by action but by emotions, reflections, and the melancholic beauty of life’s impermanence.

Tagore’s descriptions of nature—the rustling leaves, the monotonous cry of birds, and the soft warmth of the rainy afternoon—create a deeply poetic and introspective mood. The postmaster’s loneliness in the rural village and Ratan’s innocent devotion are conveyed with subtle, poignant emotions rather than dramatic conflicts. Their bond develops quietly, through simple conversations and shared silences.

The epiphany at the end—where the postmaster briefly considers returning for Ratan but ultimately dismisses the idea as part of life’s inevitable separations—is deeply lyrical. It captures the bittersweet truth of human relationships: while one person moves on easily, another is left behind, clinging to hope. This subtle heartbreak and emotional restraint make *The Postmaster* a lyrical short story, where mood and sentiment take precedence over plot.

***A Work of Art* by Anton Chekhov – epic**

It can be viewed as an epic short story because it follows a chain of events surrounding a single object, emphasizing irony, human nature, and societal norms rather than introspection.

The story revolves around a comically absurd journey of a scandalous candelabra, which is passed from person to person, each one trying to get rid of it due to its inappropriate design. The doctor, the lawyer, the comedian—all struggle to dispose of it, reflecting their moral dilemmas and societal constraints. This movement-driven narrative, where the object travels across multiple characters, gives the story an epic-like flow, even though it is brief.

The epiphany comes when the original owner, Sasha Smirnov, unknowingly returns with a matching pair, trapping the doctor in an endless loop of receiving unwanted “works of art.” This cyclical, fate-like structure, along with its social satire and commentary on art, propriety, and hypocrisy, makes it an epic short story, driven by events rather than inner emotions.

***James Joyce's A Little Cloud* – epic**

It follows a structured narrative driven by external events rather than deep lyrical introspection. The protagonist, Little Chandler, undergoes a gradual realization of his dissatisfaction as he reconnects with his old friend, Ignatius Gallaher, whose life in London contrasts sharply with Chandler's dull, domestic existence in Dublin.

The story unfolds through a series of external incidents—the reunion with Gallaher, their conversation about success and adventure, and Chandler's return home to his wife and child. Each event builds upon the previous one, creating a progressive movement towards his epiphany. The key epic aspect is the way Chandler's envy and frustration are shaped by his encounters rather than lyrical musings.

His epiphany occurs in the final scene, when his child's cries overwhelm him, leading to a moment of helpless anger and shame. He realizes that he is trapped in his mundane life, unable to escape to a world of success and excitement like Gallaher. Instead of being an internal lyrical reflection, this realization is triggered by external forces—his friend's stories, his crying child, and his wife's cold gaze—making it a narrative of events, fitting the epic mode.

***"Rain"* by Raavi Sastry – epic**

The protagonist Purushottam experiences a profound epiphany during his struggle to reach the railway station amid a relentless downpour. Initially, he is passive and uncertain, allowing circumstances and others' directions to dictate his actions. The tea-shack owner reinforces his helplessness, insisting that the rain will make his journey impossible. This mirrors Purushottam's habit of submission—whether to his uncle's push for marriage, society's expectations, or his own self-doubt.

However, the turning point comes when he witnesses the young boy, Pothuraju, returning fearlessly from his errand, defying the storm with energy and confidence. The boy's

determination contrasts sharply with Purushottam's indecision, forcing him to confront his own lack of agency. This awakens a realization in him—that strength, action, and resilience are within his grasp if he chooses to take control of his life.

The epiphany strikes like the lightning around him: he suddenly understands the girl's assessing look, the vitality of the mango tree, the endurance of the coconut palm, and the burning fire within human spirit. At that moment, Purushottam chooses to act—he steps out into the storm, embracing the challenge, no longer paralyzed by self-doubt.

This transformation, from passivity to self-determination, makes *Rain* an epic story with a deeply philosophical epiphany, where the protagonist awakens to his own strength and agency in the face of life's challenges.

"The Tell-Tale Heart" – Epic

Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* can be illustrated as an epic short story due to its intense psychological depth, dramatic tension, and the protagonist's descent into madness, leading to an inevitable and catastrophic climax. Unlike a lyrical story that focuses on emotions and reflections, an epic short story follows a grand narrative arc with rising action, conflict, and a powerful resolution.

The narrator, obsessed with the old man's "vulture eye," embarks on a meticulously planned crime, believing himself to be extraordinarily intelligent and careful. His elaborate seven-night routine of peering into the old man's room before committing the murder on the eighth night represents the rising action of the story. His actions reflect the hallmarks of an epic conflict—not between external forces, but within his own mind, as his paranoia and guilt escalate.

The climax unfolds when, after hiding the body beneath the floorboards, he invites the police in, displaying overconfidence and arrogance. However, his mental deterioration is swift, leading to the final moment of revelation. The imagined sound of the old man's heart beating—growing louder in his guilty conscience—drives him to a state of self-destruction. The epic resolution comes when he confesses in a frenzied outburst, proving his undoing.

As an epic short story, *The Tell-Tale Heart* showcases a grand psychological struggle, a step-by-step escalation of events, and a dramatic resolution, making it a gripping tale of guilt, madness, and inevitable doom.

The Call of the Flying Fish

Irony

The central irony in the story lies in the contrast between education and traditional knowledge. Society expects children like Ta-k'a-an to excel in school, yet formal education alienates them from their cultural heritage. Ta-k'a-an, labeled "Mr. Zero" at school for failing in academics, is

actually highly skilled in traditional survival techniques like fishing. The irony is that modern education is supposed to secure a future, yet it makes children feel disconnected from their ancestral ways. Instead of being valued for his practical intelligence, he is humiliated for failing in school, highlighting the clash between indigenous knowledge and formal education.

Women Characters: Ta-k'a-an's Mother and Grandmother

The absence of Ta-k'a-an's mother in the main narrative is significant. The author deliberately keeps the mother's voice silent, possibly symbolizing the passivity and struggles of women in their patriarchal society. The grandmother is mentioned briefly in passing, and we learn that she prevented Ta-k'a-an's father from pursuing higher education, which suggests that women hold traditional values and influence decisions but are still bound by societal constraints. They represent generational sacrifices, where women focus on sustaining the household while men venture into the ocean. Their struggles remain unspoken but deeply felt, making their absence even more powerful.

Shift in Tone – From Light to Emotionally Intense

The story begins with childlike excitement, as Ta-k'a-an eagerly pleads with his father to take him fishing. However, as the narrative progresses, the tone becomes more serious and full of emotion, especially as the father expresses his concerns about his son's future. The final scene, where Ta-k'a-an clutches his school paper with a big zero while reflecting on his ocean adventure, is deeply emotional. His moment of pride and empowerment in the sea contrasts sharply with his humiliation at school, making the ending poignant and bittersweet.

Pathos – Evoking Sympathy and Sorrow

The story is filled with pathos, particularly in how it portrays Ta-k'a-an's inner conflict. As a child, he longs for freedom and recognition, but society labels him a failure. His father's deep sighs reflect his silent disappointment and worry for his son's future. Ta-k'a-an's defiance and dreams of becoming a fisherman, despite his poor school performance, make the reader sympathize with him. The final image of him holding his crumpled school report while reminiscing about the sea is heartbreaking, emphasizing how systemic education fails to recognize indigenous wisdom.

The story resonates with the universal theme of identity and self-worth, making it deeply emotional and thought-provoking.

Märchen (Fairy Tales) in Simple Terms

Märchen, or fairy tales, are a type of folk story that includes magic, supernatural elements, and extraordinary events. These stories often give ordinary people special abilities like magical powers or secret knowledge. The term *Märchen*, used by folklorists, includes tall tales and humorous stories, typically beginning with "*Once upon a time...*" to create a sense of timelessness and universality.

The main theme in Märchen is overcoming difficulties, sometimes with magical help. The hero, who is usually poor or an underdog, succeeds where others fail, often by luck or cleverness. Common characters include witches, evil stepmothers, ogres, princes, and fairies. A familiar pattern in many fairy tales is that the hero gains access to the king, wins his favor, marries a princess, and inherits the kingdom. These stories exist in almost every culture, such as German, French, Indian, and Persian, but their exact origins are unknown.

Fairy tales appeal to our sense of wonder and imagination, allowing us to believe in wish-fulfillment and magical adventures. The purpose of Märchen can be moral lessons, satire, fantasy, or adventure, but magic and supernatural elements are always a key part of the storytelling.

There are two types of Märchen:

1. Primary Märchen – These are anonymous, passed down orally from generation to generation.
2. Secondary Märchen – These are written or adapted consciously by authors.

Although myths and Märchen share similar elements, they are different in their focus. Myths deal with religious themes and heroic legends, while Märchen are more about the dreams and fantasies of everyday people. Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp studied fairy tales and found that their plots follow a fixed structure, with a limited number of characters (max 7) and actions (max 31). The common storyline includes the hero leaving home, receiving magical aid, and defeating a villain. Not every fairy tale has all 31 steps, but they always follow the same sequence, making Märchen highly structured yet endlessly fascinating.

Understanding Tributary Forms: Sketch and Yarn

Stories and narratives come in different forms, often blending together. Two such forms are sketch and yarn, each with distinct characteristics but sometimes overlapping in storytelling.

Sketch

A sketch is mainly descriptive, focusing on what a person, place, or thing is like, rather than what happens to them. It is not centered on action or plot development. For example, if we say,

"Fred was an unhappy chap with a melancholic face," this is a sketch because it describes Fred's personality and mood without telling us a story. However, if we say, "Fred packed up and left his village to seek his fortune," it introduces action, leading the narrative toward a yarn.

A sketch is almost static, meaning it does not necessarily move towards a full story. One of the most famous collections of sketches is Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book* (1820). However, some of its pieces, like *Rip Van Winkle*, develop into yarns rather than remaining pure sketches.

The purpose of a sketch is to paint a picture in the reader's mind, weaving together thoughts, personalities, and scenes from everyday life. In the 1820s and 1830s, many regional sketches described local landscapes, customs, and lifestyles. In England, essayists like Charles Lamb used sketches to capture memories or personalities, such as in *South Sea House* or *Oxford in the Vacation*. Similarly, writers like Walter Pater (*A Child in the House*) and George Orwell (*Shooting an Elephant*) created sketches that described people, places, or situations in a thoughtful and contemplative way.

Although a simple description of a landscape or a pen portrait cannot be a full short story, a sketch often moves towards narrative by hinting at a larger story or event. Some great examples include Khushwant Singh's *Portrait of a Lady* and James Thurber's *University Days*, both of which capture personality and experience in a detailed and engaging manner.

Yarn

A yarn is a long, elaborate anecdote or a collection of small anecdotes that form a larger narrative. The storytelling style is often casual and conversational, much like oral traditions where a storyteller engages an audience. The term *yarn* actually comes from sailor's slang, where "rope-making" became a metaphor for spinning a tale. This is why yarns often have a campfire, barroom, or shipboard storytelling atmosphere, where stories are shared in a relaxed, entertaining manner.

Unlike fairy tales, which often involve supernatural elements, yarns are more realistic or naturalistic. Even when they contain highly improbable events, they are narrated in a matter-of-fact tone, making them seem almost believable. This style is also called tall tales, where exaggeration is key, but the delivery is completely serious.

A great example of a yarn is R.K. Narayan's *Night of the Cyclone*, where dramatic and unusual events unfold in a seemingly ordinary setting. The key to a good yarn is that it keeps the audience engaged, whether through humor, suspense, or sheer absurdity.

Summary of *The Portrait of a Lady* by Khushwant Singh

Khushwant Singh's *The Portrait of a Lady* is a touching and nostalgic account of the narrator's deep bond with his grandmother. The story captures the gradual transformation of their relationship as he grows up, moves to the city, and later travels abroad.

The grandmother is described as an old woman who, according to the narrator, had always been old. She was deeply religious, spending her days reciting prayers and telling beads on her rosary. In his childhood, the narrator and his grandmother were very close. She took care of him, woke him up, helped him get ready for school, and accompanied him to a village school, which was attached to a temple. While he learned alphabets and prayers from the priest, she sat inside reading religious scriptures. She also had a habit of feeding stray dogs on their way home.

However, when they moved to the city, their relationship changed. The narrator started going to an English school in a motorbus, and she no longer accompanied him. She disapproved of his education, particularly the lack of religious teachings and the introduction of subjects like science and music, which she associated with beggars and courtesans. As he progressed to university, the gap between them widened, and she spent most of her time spinning the charkha (spinning wheel) and feeding sparrows.

When the narrator decided to go abroad for higher studies, he expected her to be emotional. Instead, she maintained her calm, praying continuously and sending him off without shedding a tear. When he returned after five years, she remained unchanged. However, on the day of his arrival, she broke her usual routine—instead of praying, she sang songs of warriors' homecoming, celebrating his return. This sudden change foreshadowed her imminent death.

The next day, she fell ill and, believing her end was near, devoted her last moments to prayer and meditation. She passed away peacefully. When the family prepared for her funeral, thousands of sparrows gathered silently around her, mourning her death in their own way. Even when offered food, they refused to eat, highlighting the deep spiritual connection she had shared with them.

This story is a poignant tribute to the grandmother's unwavering faith, love, and dignity. It highlights the contrast between modernity and tradition, the loss of familial closeness, and the profound, silent grief expressed by the sparrows, making her passing deeply moving and symbolic.

Summary of *University Days* by James Thurber

University Days is a humorous and self-deprecating account of James Thurber's experiences in college. In this essay, he shares his struggles with different subjects and how he barely managed to graduate. Through a series of amusing anecdotes, he highlights the absurdities of the education system and the challenges of being an average student.

Struggles with Botany

Thurber begins by describing his difficulties in botany class. One of the course requirements was to look at plant cells under a microscope, but no matter how hard he tried, he could never see anything clearly. His professor, frustrated by Thurber's inability, accused him of pretending not to see the cells. Despite multiple attempts to adjust the microscope, all Thurber could see was a milky, blurry substance. His professor, who was determined to prove that Thurber could see, lost his patience and even swore that he would give up teaching if Thurber failed again.

Thurber tried the course again a year later but still couldn't see the cells. At one point, he managed to draw what he saw, thinking he had finally succeeded. However, when the professor checked his drawing, he was furious—it turned out that Thurber had drawn a reflection of his own eye! The incident was both embarrassing and hilarious, showcasing Thurber's struggle with practical science.

Challenges in Economics

Thurber also had trouble in his economics class, but not as much as one of his classmates—Bolenciewicz, a football player. Since athletes had to maintain passing grades to stay on the team, professors often made it easier for them. One day, the professor asked Bolenciewicz a very simple question: "*Name one means of transportation.*" Despite multiple hints—including the professor making train sounds like "choo-choo"—the football player remained confused. The entire class tried to help him by making locomotive sounds, but he still didn't understand. Finally, after much struggle, he gave the correct answer: "Train." The professor quickly moved on to another student, relieved that the football player had managed to answer at least one question correctly.

Horrors of Gym Class

Gym class was even worse for Thurber than botany or economics. Because he had poor eyesight, he had to remove his glasses during physical activities, which led to frequent accidents. He would bump into people, equipment, and even professors. He also had to pass a swimming test, but since he disliked swimming, he managed to cheat by convincing another student to swim in his place. The boy who helped him was kind enough to do so, but unfortunately, there was no way Thurber could cheat in botany as well.

Another unpleasant experience in gym class was the **physical examination**. On the first day, students were required to strip and answer questions about their health and background. One student, an agriculture major, was asked which college he was in, and he confidently

responded, "Ohio State University," misunderstanding the question. This highlighted the awkwardness and confusion students often felt during gym class.

The Struggles of a Journalism Student

Thurber also shares an amusing story about Haskins, a student studying journalism but struggling with writing. Haskins was assigned to report on the university's **agriculture department**, which included covering the horse barns. However, his writing was dull and uninteresting. Frustrated, the editor of the college newspaper asked him to make his stories more engaging. Haskins then submitted an article about a disease affecting the university's horses, starting with a strange and awkward opening sentence:

"Who has noticed the sores on the tops of the horses in the animal husbandry building?"

The sentence was unintentionally humorous, showing how Haskins struggled with journalism despite knowing a lot about animals.

Military Drills and an Unexpected Promotion

At Ohio State University, students were required to take two years of **military training**, where they learned outdated Civil War tactics despite World War I going on at the time. Thurber, like many of his classmates, disliked military drills. His lack of skill in marching made him stand out in the worst way possible.

One day, during a drill session, General Littlefield tried to confuse the cadets by rapidly giving commands. After a few minutes, all the students were marching in one direction—except Thurber, who was marching alone at a different angle. Surprisingly, he was the only one doing it correctly! This mistake somehow earned him a promotion to corporal, much to his disbelief.

Later, General Littlefield summoned Thurber to his office. However, when Thurber arrived, the general seemed to have forgotten why he had called him. Instead of discussing anything important, the general focused on swatting flies on his desk. After a long, awkward silence, he suddenly barked, *"Button up your coat!"* even though he was looking at a fly instead of Thurber. The encounter ended without any real conversation, leaving Thurber confused but relieved.

Summary of *A Night of Cyclone* by R.K. Narayan

Introduction

The story is narrated by *The Talkative Man*, a humorous and engaging storyteller. He recalls the terrifying night when a cyclone struck Vizagapatam, where he was working as a supervisor for a mansion under construction. His job was relatively easy, and he was happy with his life, especially since his wife was expecting their first child. However, everything changed when a massive storm arrived.

The Calm Before the Storm

One morning in November, the narrator woke up to a strange, dark atmosphere. The sky looked ominous, and the workers at the construction site refused to work, fearing a disaster. The narrator dismissed their concerns and ordered them to continue. However, as he walked through the bazaar later, he noticed an unsettling calm. Shops were closing in broad daylight, and people seemed anxious. A schoolboy, crying, asked him if the world was going to end, as his teacher had warned. This added to the narrator's growing unease.

The Arrival of the Cyclone

As the day progressed, things worsened. By the afternoon, strong winds began shaking the trees, and the sea turned dark and violent. The narrator sensed an impending catastrophe but still tried to go about his routine. His wife, already feeling unwell due to her pregnancy, grew nervous as the storm intensified.

By nightfall, the cyclone had fully arrived. The wind howled, the rain poured violently, and the sea roared like a demon. Inside the house, the narrator tried to distract his wife by reading to her, but she soon started experiencing labor pains. As she lay in discomfort, he realized that he needed to prepare food. However, starting a fire was a challenge, and after many failed attempts, he gave up.

Hunger and the Scorpion Sting

Desperate for food, he searched the kitchen and found some milk. Just as he was about to drink it, he thought of saving it for his wife. Searching for something else to eat, he put his hand in a pot of tamarind and suddenly felt a sharp sting—it was a **scorpion!** The venomous sting caused unbearable pain, but there was no time to rest.

A Desperate Search for Help

Despite his pain, the narrator knew his wife needed medical assistance. Braving the storm, he stepped outside with an umbrella and a lantern, only to have both snatched away by the wind. The road was flooded, and he stumbled over stones and bushes, drenched in rain and shaking with cold. He first ran to a European officer's bungalow but was too afraid of his **ferocious dog** to seek help.

Remembering that a doctor lived nearby, he rushed to his house, only to be informed by the doctor's wife that her husband was away in Bombay for a month. Frustrated and exhausted, the narrator **wept like a child** in despair.

The Climax – The Baby is Born

Realizing that there was no help, he ran back home. His wife, in pain, was relieved when he falsely assured her that help was on the way. Suddenly, a loud crash echoed through the

house—the **kitchen had collapsed**. A violent gust of wind **smashed the window**, throwing the room into complete darkness.

As the narrator struggled to fix the broken window, his wife's cries reached their peak. Then, suddenly, amid the chaos, **a baby's cry filled the stormy night**—his son was born! The narrator was stunned, overwhelmed by relief and joy.

The Ransom of Red Chief by O. Henry

Introduction

The story is a humorous and ironic take on a kidnapping gone terribly wrong. Two petty criminals, Sam (the narrator) and Bill Driscoll, plan to **kidnap a rich man's child** and demand a ransom of **\$1,500**. They believe that parents in small rural towns love their children so much that they would pay anything to get them back. However, their plan quickly turns into a nightmare when they realize that the kidnapped child is more than they can handle.

The Kidnapping

Sam and Bill arrive in the small town of Summit, Alabama, and choose Johnny Dorset, the ten-year-old son of Ebenezer Dorset, a wealthy man, as their victim. Johnny is a mischievous boy with bright red hair, which later earns him the nickname "Red Chief."

The kidnapping does not go smoothly. Johnny fights back fiercely, hitting Bill in the face with a brick and putting up a strong resistance. However, they manage to take him to a cave in the mountains, where they plan to keep him until they receive the ransom.

To their surprise, Johnny is not scared at all. Instead, he enjoys the adventure and believes he is playing a game of cowboys and Indians. He names himself "Red Chief" and makes Bill play the role of a captured trapper who will be scalped at sunrise. Sam is given the name "Snake-Eye, the Spy", and Johnny decides he will burn him at the stake.

The Nightmare Begins

As the night progresses, Johnny refuses to sleep, keeping Bill and Sam awake with his endless energy and war cries. The next morning, Bill wakes up screaming because Johnny is trying to scalp him with a knife.

By now, Bill is terrified of the boy, and Sam starts to realize they may have made a big mistake. They had expected Johnny to cry and beg to go home, but instead, he is having the time of his life playing rough games and torturing Bill.

Throughout the day, Johnny continues to cause trouble. He:

- Throws a rock at Bill's head, knocking him unconscious.
 - Puts a hot potato down Bill's back and stomps on it.
 - Asks constant, annoying questions, making Bill lose his patience.
-

Writing the Ransom Letter

Realizing that Johnny's parents haven't even started looking for him, Sam and Bill write a ransom letter to Ebenezer Dorset, demanding \$1,500 for Johnny's return. However, Bill is so desperate to get rid of the boy that he begs Sam to lower the ransom to \$1,500 from \$2,000, thinking that even that amount might be too high for such a troublesome child.

Sam delivers the ransom letter by placing it at a secret drop location near the town. He then returns to the cave, only to find that Bill has had enough. Bill tried to send Johnny home, but the boy came back on his own! Bill looks defeated and hopeless.

The Unexpected Response

Later that evening, Sam retrieves Ebenezer Dorset's response to the ransom note. However, instead of agreeing to pay for Johnny's return, Dorset makes his own counteroffer:

- Sam and Bill must pay HIM \$250 to take his son back.
- They must return Johnny at night to avoid angry neighbors who might attack them.

At first, Sam is shocked and angry, but then he looks at Bill, who is completely exhausted and desperate. Bill immediately agrees to Dorset's terms, willing to pay any amount just to get rid of Johnny.

The Escape

At midnight, Sam and Bill take Johnny back home, tricking him into thinking his father has bought him a rifle and moccasins for a bear hunt. However, when Johnny realizes he is being left at home, he throws a tantrum and clings to Bill's leg, refusing to let go.

Ebenezer Dorset slowly peels Johnny off Bill, saying he can only hold him back for ten minutes before he escapes again. Hearing this, Bill immediately runs away at full speed, desperate to get as far away from Johnny as possible.

Sam, who is a fast runner, tries to catch up with Bill, but Bill is already a mile and a half away—running for his life!

Irony

The irony in *The Ransom of Red Chief* lies in the complete reversal of expectations. Typically, in a kidnapping scenario, the victim is terrified, and the captors are in control, demanding ransom. However, in this story, the kidnapped boy, Johnny (Red Chief), enjoys being taken and becomes the real tormentor, while the kidnappers, Sam and Bill, suffer endlessly at his hands. Instead of being scared, Johnny is thrilled by the adventure, treating it as a fun game where he terrorizes his captors with violent pranks, endless energy, and mischievous games. The greatest irony is in the ransom demand—instead of the father paying to get his son back, he demands that the kidnappers pay him \$250 to take the boy off their hands. This unexpected twist turns the entire crime into a hilarious disaster, leaving the criminals broken, desperate, and fleeing for their lives, rather than profiting from their scheme.

Comical

The Ransom of Red Chief is a comical story because of its absurd role reversal and exaggerated humor. Instead of the kidnapped boy being scared and helpless, Johnny (Red Chief) embraces the situation enthusiastically, treating his captors as playmates in his wild cowboy-and-Indian fantasies. His over-the-top behavior, such as trying to scalp Bill, throwing rocks, putting a hot potato down Bill's back, and making them his prisoners, turns the kidnappers into the real victims.

One of the funniest illustrations of this is when Bill, a tough outlaw, wakes up screaming because Red Chief is sitting on his chest, holding a knife, pretending to scalp him. Another is when Johnny insists on playing "Black Scout" and forces Bill to act as his horse, making him crawl on all fours for ninety imaginary miles.

The ultimate comic twist comes at the end when Johnny's father demands the kidnappers pay him \$250 to take his son back. Bill, completely broken, agrees, and as soon as they return the boy, he runs away so fast that Sam struggles to keep up. The exaggerated suffering of the criminals, the unpredictable antics of Red Chief, and the unexpected conclusion make the story a masterpiece of humor through irony and slapstick situations.

An work of Art

What is the theme of this story and ironies?

The central theme of Chekhov's story revolves around the tension between genuine artistic appreciation and the rigid constraints of social convention. The antique candelabra, which Sasha admires as a masterpiece of beauty and expressive power, becomes a symbol of the clash between art for art's sake and the restrictive norms of polite society. Sasha and those who truly appreciate its aesthetic value see it as a work capable of elevating the spirit, while the doctor—and later his social circle—view it through the lens of respectability and decorum, fearing its provocative form might offend the delicate sensibilities of their peers. This fundamental irony—that something created to inspire admiration instead provokes discomfort and embarrassment—exposes the superficiality and hypocrisy of social attitudes toward art. Rather than engaging with the candelabra's artistic merit, the characters allow convention and propriety to dictate their judgment, illustrating how true artistic expression often finds itself in conflict with societal expectations. Through the candelabra's journey from reverence to rejection, Chekhov satirizes the emptiness of social pretense, showing that art's worth is rarely judged on its own merits but is instead filtered through personal biases and the pressures of conformity.