**Tight Corners – E V Lucas**

**Summary**

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**Introduction**

“Tight Corners” by E.V. Lucas, describes one of the most difficult situations faced by him and how he is saved from humiliation at an auction house by a sudden stroke of luck. There is a sense of relaxation at the end of this essay, when E.V. Lucas asks his friend whether his hair has turned white or not. It shows how difficult the situation has become for the narrator. This difficult situation is referred to as “Tight Corner” in the Essay.

**An Auction**

The story begins in a sale room at King’s Street, where an auction was going on. Barbizon pictures were getting sold with tremendous amount for each. Two thousand, three thousand were paid just for pictures containing things like forest scenes, pools at evening, shepherdesses, and the regular subjects.

The narrator had only sixty-three pounds in his bank and apart from that he had no knowledge about art pictures. Not understanding the event properly and the seriousness of the auction, Lucas started raising the bid amount.

**Narrator’s Bad Luck**

A Daubingy picture was put on sale for which a wealthy man bade four thousand guineas. On seeing the increasing values of pictures, the narrator raised the bid by fifty guineas more just out of fun. But to his bad luck, his picture had only few takers. Nobody came forward with a higher price and the auction price fell on him. This was the Tight Corner, in which Lucas was placed and apart from stress he also faced a great mental anguish.

Sensing the danger of the situation, Lucas’s friend left the place and he went to the first red-faced bidder and convinced him to get the picture from the narrator by offering fifty guineas. At such serious moment, the narrator had no other choice left with him and he decided to admit his foolishness to the auctioneer in order to get himself free from such a sensitive environment.

**An Unexpected Incident**

Suddenly, a man approached the narrator and said, “The gentleman who bade for four thousand guineas will give you fifty guineas and take the picture”. It was totally a sudden and unexpected incident for the narrator to believe. He was so relieved that he was about to weep in joy. At such a happy and overwhelming situation, the narrator did not forget to grasp the opportunity and demand a hundred guineas. He was extremely lucky at this point as his demand was fulfilled and a cheque for this amount was given to him and his joy was doubled.

At the end, the two things narrator could never forget about his friend was the fact that his friend was the one who took him to the auction and the other thing was the favour, which his friend did on him by convincing the red-faced man to offer fifty guineas to the narrator.

**About the Author – Lucas**

He was an English humorist, Essayist, Playwright, Biographer, Publisher, Poet, Novelist, Short Story writer and an editor. He was a prolific writer, mostly celebrated for his short essays, but he also produced verses, novels and plays as well.

**Vocabuary**

* Brittany – a region on the coast of North–West France
* St. James’ Street, King Street – well-known commercial streets in London
* bloatocrat – a fat and rich person of high station – a term coined by E.V. Lucas by blending the words ‘bloated’ and ‘aristocrat’
* electrified – shocked by something unexpected
* crescendo – progress towards a climax
* congealed – thickened as if frozen (through fear etc.)
* smothered – suppressed
* nonchalantly – unconcernedly, coolly
* glibly – smoothly but not sincerely
* note of hand – promissory note
* rectitude – honesty, good behaviour
* farthing – as low as a paise
* baize – coarse woollen material
* guile – cunning, deceit
* indelible – cannot be rubbed out or removed

**Meanings**

critical - dangerous, grave

comprise - contain

tide - high wave

skin of his teeth - narrow escape

torpedoed - destroyed

persuaded - convinced

tremendous - wonderful (here huge)

bloatocrat - rich

quite - fairly, remarkably

electrified - shocked

rustle - whisper

terrible - horrible, awful

horror - fear

shot his bolt - reached the highest

congealed - frozen

curious - strange

smothered - suppressed

pickle - trouble

remote - far off stunned - shocked, confused

dazed - confused

sufficiently - enough

nonchalantly - unconcernedly

pondering - thinking

glibly - superficially

speculating - guessing

confessing - accepting

rectified - corrected

outskirts - boundary, outer edge

knot - (here) group

preferred - liked

rammed - pushed, struck

colder feet - fear

rectitude - honesty

guile - cunning

grave - serious

indelibly - cannot be removed

**Choose the most appropriate answer for the following questions:**

a. ‘Tight Corner’ means a \_\_\_\_\_\_.

difficult situation

crowded corner

tragic incident

fierce fight

Ans : difficult situation

b. Barbizon refers to a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

kind of paint

type of architecture

region in Britain

French school of painters

Ans : French school of painters

c. The narrator visited the sale-room as he \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

wished to see an auction

had a painting to sell

was persuaded by his friend

wanted to buy a painting

Ans : was persuaded by his friend

d. The narrator had been a safe contributor at the auction, as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

there were bidders quoting higher prices

he had a sound financial background

his friend had lent him money

he did not make any bidding

Ans : there were bidders quoting higher prices

e. “And I got it.” Here ‘it’ refers to the\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

picture he wanted to buy

money he asked for

card to participate in the auction

amount he had to pay

Ans : money he asked for

**Form a meaningful summary of the lesson by rewriting the numbers in the correct sequence:**

a) The narrator had only 63 pounds with him and did not know how to manage the situation.

b) The narrator thought of all his relations from whom he could borrow.

c) Unfortunately he had made the highest bid.

d) The narrator entered Christie’s as his friend persuaded him to visit the sale‒room.

e) Every time someone else made a higher bid and the narrator was not caught.

f) The narrator on a sudden impulse added 50 more guineas, to the amount offered.

g) His friend joined him then but left immediately unable to control his laughter.

h) He even thought of borrowing from moneylenders and considered the possibility of confessing the truth to the staff at Christie’s.

i) The picture was declared sold to the narrator.

j) After sometime a picture was put up and a bid for 4000 guineas was raised.

k) A sudden stroke of luck befell the narrator when he heard that the gent who had made the bid of 4000 guineas would offer him the additional 50 guineas and buy the picture.

l) The narrator kept bidding just for fun.

m) The picture was given away to the other bidder and the narrator was saved from humiliation.

n) His friend had left the place roaring with laughter at the narrator’s predicament.

o) The narrator was quite happy at the offer but demanded 100 guineas instead of the 50. Now there was no need for him to make any payment.

**Rewritten**

d) The narrator entered Christie’s as his friend persuaded him to visit the sale-room.

l) The narrator kept the bidding just for fun.

e) Every time someone else made a higher bid and the narrator was not caught.

j) After sometime a picture was put up and a bid for 4000 guineas was raised.

f) The narrator on a sudden impulse added 50 more guineas to the amount offered.

c) Unfortunately he had made the highest bid.

i) The picture was declared sold to the narrator.

a) The narrator had only 63 pounds with him and did not know how to manage the situation.

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m) The picture was given to the other bidder and the narrator was saved from humiliation.

**Answer the following questions in a paragraph of about 100 – 150 words.**

**a) Narrate the circumstances that led to the narrator getting into a tight corner by his own folly.**

E V Lucas in his essay ‘Tight Corners’ tries to explain how the mental tight corner is worse than physical tight corner. The narrator entered Christie’s, the famous auction house persuaded by his friend. He saw Barbizon pictures were being sold and they were auctioned for very high prizes like four thousand guineas. The narrator did not want to buy any pictures but he simply stood there to see what was going on. He wanted to enjoy fun of taking part in the auction cautiously. Though the pictures were auctioned for huge sum it started very moderately. So he was adding something to the deal in the beginning. It was a safe game. His friend warned him that he might be caught and he asked him to stop his game. But he was sure that he was very cautious and he would never be in trouble. It went on for some time very safely. When a picture was put up for auction a dealer who had bought many other pictures asked for four thousand guineas. Others were excited to hear that. But the narrator without realizing the value of the call simply said, “And fifty”. There was a dead silence and the dealer who had kept four thousand guineas was silent and the sale fell on the narrator.

**b) Trace the thought that went on in the mind of the narrator when the picture after picture was put up and sold at the auction.**

E V Lucas in his essay ‘Tight Corners’ tries to explain how the mental tight corner is worse than the physical tight corner. The narrator entered Christie’s, the famous auction house persuaded by his friend. He saw Barbizon pictures were being sold and they were auctioned for very high prizes like four thousand guineas. The narrator did not want to buy any pictures but he simply stood there to see what was going on. He wanted to enjoy fun of taking part in the auction cautiously. His friend warned him that he might be caught and he asked him to stop his game. But he was sure that he was very cautious and he would never be in trouble. But unfortunately he was caught. He had to find four thousand and fifty guineas to buy a picture which he did not want. He was in real trouble. Pictures after pictures were being sold. He did not mind about them. He was trying to get some names of this relatives who would be kind enough to lend him money. He did not get anybody in his mind. He thought it would be good to confess his poverty to the Christie’s staff. But he knew that after participating in many other auctions he could not do that. Moreover a genuine mistake of this kind could have been rectified at once.

**c) Explain how the narrator got out of the tight corner that he was in.**

E V Lucas in his essay ‘Tight Corners’ tries to explain how the mental tight corner is worse than physical tight corner. The narrator entered Christie’s, the famous auction house persuaded by his friend. He saw Barbizon pictures were being sold and they were auctioned for very high prizes like four thousand guineas. The narrator did not want to buy any pictures but he simply stood there to see what was going on. He wanted to enjoy fun of taking part in the auction cautiously. His friend warned him that he might be caught and he asked him to stop his game. But he was sure that he was very cautious and he would never be in trouble. But unfortunately he was caught. When the auctions were over the dealers were standing in a queue to give the payment. He decided to stand in the outskirt. As he was standing a new man came to him and asked him whether he was the one who had bought the particular picture. When he said yes, the other man asked him whether he was ready to sell the picture for the one who had made a bid for four thousand guineas for the picture. He was ready to give him fifty guineas for the picture. His presence of mind pushed him to ask him hundred guineas and he got it. Thus he escaped from the tight corner with a cheque for 100 guineas.

**d) As the narrator make a diary entry about the tight corner you faced at Christie’s and how you were saved from the dire situation.**

10th June,

11 a.m.

Entered the Christie’s with my friend.

Many pictures were being auctioned.

Started bidding in the low level for fun.

My friend warned me.

I was safe and I did not bother about the warning from my friend.

A new picture was put up for auction.

One rich dealer made his bid with 4 thousand guineas.

Without realizing the value of the money I said fifty more.

To my surprise and shock the other dealer stopped his bidding.

The picture was in my name.

I had only sixty three pounds in my bank.

I tried to get the names of my relatives to borrow money.

I decided to confess my poverty to the Christie’s staff but it was too late.

Stood last in the queue.

Met by a man who was sent by the rich dealer.

He asked me to give the picture for 50 guineas, I asked for 100.

He gave the cheque and got the picture.

Immense relief after harrowing experience.

**Idioms:**

An idiom is an expression in English with a special meaning of its own. Idioms do not give the literal meaning of the individual words used in them.

You come across the idiom ‘by the skin of one’s teeth’ in the lesson. It means ‘a narrow escape’.

**A. Use the idioms in your own sentences.**

1. **tight corners :**

We should be careful in life not to get into tight corners.

2. **shot his bolt :**

In the discussion he shot his bolt and other had to accept his view.

3. **in a nice pickle :**

When the headmaster called me making a noise in the class I was in a nice pickle.

4. **have cold feet :**

When I was chased by a dog I had cold feet

**(B) Match the following idioms related to difficult situations with their meanings.**

A B

1. alarm bells ringing a. abandoning one who is in difficulty

2. back to the wall b. try any method to overcome a crisis

3. grasp /clutch at straws c. sign of something going wrong

4. saved by the bell d. in serious difficulty

5. hang out to dry e. help at the last moment rescuing one from a

difficult situation

Ans : 1 – c, 2 – d, 3 – b, 4 - e, 5 – a