

READING COMPREHENSION:

ADAPTATION OF **THE OPEN WINDOW** BY SAKI

Read the adaptation of this short story by Saki, first published in 1914. Then answer the the questions that follow.



“My aunt will be down shortly, Mr. Nuttel,” said a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen. “In the meantime, you must try and put up with me.”

Framton Nuttel smiled politely. Privately, he doubted whether these formal visits to a series of total strangers would help calm his nerves, as they were supposed to. “I know how it will be,” his sister had said as he was preparing to migrate to this rural retreat. “You will bury yourself there and speak to no one; your nerves will be worse than ever from moping. I shall give you letters of introduction to the people I know there. Some of them were quite nice.” Framton wondered whether Mrs. Sappleton, the lady to whom he was presenting one of the letters of introduction, came into the “nice” division.

“Do you know many of the people round here?” asked the niece, after a sufficient period of silence.

“Hardly a soul,” said Framton. “My sister stayed here, some four years ago. She gave me letters of introduction to some people here.” He said this with a tone of distinct regret.

“Then you know practically nothing about my aunt?” pursued the self-possessed young lady.

“Only her name and address,” admitted the caller.

The child said, “Her great tragedy happened just three years ago; that would be since your sister’s time.”

“Her tragedy?” asked Framton; somehow in this restful country spot tragedies seemed out of place.

“You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon,” said the niece, indicating a large French window that opened on to a lawn.

“It is warm for this time of year,” said Framton. “But has that window got anything to do with the tragedy?”

“Out through that window, three years ago today, my aunt’s husband and two brothers went off for their day of hunting. They never came back. In crossing the moor, all three were trapped in a treacherous piece of bog. It had been dreadfully wet that summer, and places that were safe in other years gave way without warning. Their bodies were never recovered.” Here the child’s voice lost its self-possessed note and became falteringly human.

“Poor aunt always thinks they’ll come back someday, they and the little brown spaniel that was lost with them, and walk in at that window just as they used to do. She keeps the window open every evening till dusk. Poor aunt, she often talks of how they went out, her husband with his white coat, and her youngest brother singing ‘Bertie, why do you bound?’* as he always did to tease her, because it got on her nerves. You know...on still, quiet evenings like this, I sometimes get a creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window...”

*This is a reference to the song “Bertie the Bounder” that was popular when this story was written.

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Continue reading. Then answer the questions that follow.

She broke off with a little shudder. It was a relief to Framton when the aunt bustled into the room with a whirl of apologies for being late.

“I hope Vera has been amusing you,” Mrs. Sappleton said. “And I hope you don’t mind the open window. My husband and brothers will be home soon from hunting. They come in this way so as not to make a mess of the carpets.” She rattled on cheerfully about her husband and brothers’ hunting pursuits. To Framton it was all purely horrible. His hostess was clearly distracted, her eyes constantly straying to the open window and the lawn beyond. What an unfortunate coincidence that he paid his visit on this tragic anniversary.



In a desperate effort to turn the talk to a less ghastly topic, Framton announced, “The doctors have ordered me complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of all strenuous exercise.” Framton labored under the delusion that total strangers were hungry for details of his ailments.

“Is that so?” said Mrs. Sappleton, just barely stifling a yawn. Then she suddenly brightened into alert attention. “Here they are at last!” she cried. “Just in time for tea!”

Framton shivered and turned toward the niece with a look of sympathetic comprehension. But the child was staring out the open window with dazed horror. Framton swung round in his seat and looked in the same direction.

In the deepening twilight, three figures walked across the lawn toward the window, one of them wearing a white coat. A brown spaniel was close at their heels. Noiselessly they neared the house; then a voice chanted out of the dusk, “Bertie, why do you bound?”



Framton grabbed wildly at his stick and hat; the hall door, the gravel drive, and the front gate were dimly noted stages in his headlong retreat. A cyclist coming along the road had to run into the hedge to avoid an immediate collision.

“Here we are, my dear,” said the man with the white coat, coming in through the window. “Not too terribly muddy. Who was that who bolted out as we came up?”

“A most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel,” said Mrs. Sappleton. “Only talked about his illnesses, and dashed off without a word when you arrived. One would think he’d seen a ghost.”

“I expect it was the spaniel,” said the niece calmly. “He told me he had a *horror* of dogs. He was once chased into a cemetery by a pack of vicious dogs along the Ganges. He spent the night in a newly dug grave, the creatures snarling above him. Enough to make anyone lose their nerve.”

Romance at short notice was her specialty.

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Answer the following questions about the adaptation of "The Open Window" by Saki.

- 1. Which of the following statements best reflects the central idea of the story?
 - a. A woman is confused by a man's strange behavior.
 - b. A girl plays a trick on an unsuspecting stranger.
 - c. A man recovers from an illness that affects his nerves.
 - d. A woman's long-lost family returns from the dead.

2. In paragraphs 1, 5, and 11, the author uses the word "self-possessed" in reference to the niece. What does this word indicate about the girl?

3. At the beginning of the story, how does Framton Nuttel feel about being at the Sappleton home? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

4. In paragraphs 3 and 5, Vera asks Mr. Nuttel two questions that seem like polite conversation. After reading the entire story, what is the significance of these questions?

5. Which **three** adjectives below describe the character of Framton Nuttel?
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|--------------|--------------|------------------|
| a. nervous | c. malicious | e. outgoing |
| b. deceitful | d. gullible | f. self-involved |

6. Use text evidence to support your choice of one of the adjectives in Question 5.

7. Vera knows things that Framton Nuttel does not. Describe the effect of this knowledge disparity on Mr. Nuttel's view of the men's arrival.

8. Throughout most of the story, the reader is as unaware of Vera's deceitfulness as is Mr. Nuttel. At what point might the reader suspect the deceit, and at what point can the reader be sure of it?

9. How does the author use **dramatic irony** at the end of the story? What effect does it have?

10. What does the last sentence of the passage, "Romance at short notice was her specialty," indicate about Vera?
- a. Vera does not like living with her aunt and uncle.
 - b. Vera has a knack for making people fall in love.
 - c. Vera enjoys reading romantic love stories.
 - d. Vera has a talent for creating extraordinary tales.