

Hard Copy Assignments, March 30th - April 24th

ACT Prep

March 30th - April 3rd

- Read the short story, "The Story Of An Hour"
- Answer the following questions in no less than 3-4 complete sentences
 1. Why does Chopin introduce the reader to her main character as "Mrs. Mallard" rather than by her first name?
 2. Explain the symbolism of the blue sky, both in her reminiscence as a young girl, and now, as she looks out the window.
 3. Chopin describes a broad range of emotions throughout the story. In the end, what do you think really killed Louisa?

April 6th - 9th (Good Friday/Easter Weekend)

- Read the short story, "A Dark Brown Dog"
- Answer the following questions in no less than 3-4 complete sentences
 1. What does the leash symbolize? Why does the child assume it is a stray, rather than separated from its owner?
 2. Describe the symbolism of the Dog's reluctance to follow The Child up the stairs

April 13th - 17th

- Read the short story, "The Open Boat"
- Answer the following questions in no less than 3-4 complete sentences
 1. Why is only the Oiler given a name and why are the others only referred to generally?
 2. What "patterns" or "repetitions" do you find in the story and how are these important to understanding the story?
 3. What do you think about the ending to the story (after we find out that Billie the Oiler dies)? Is it truthful, or is the narrator making a point?

April 20th - 24th

- Read the short story, "The Boarded Window"
- Answer the following questions in no less than 3-4 complete sentences
 1. Describe Murlock's wife and explain what type of relationship she had with Murlock.
 2. Who is telling the story in "The Boarded Window" and how did they find out about Murlock?
 3. Does Murlock appear to be a socialite, if so, who has seen him and have they had conversations with him?

If at all possible, please utilize google classroom for your classwork. These assignments, plus additional online resources, will be posted there over the course of our extended break. Google classroom is preferred, so students should ONLY do hard copy assignments if they can not access google classroom.

Class Code: e3m7lr4

The Story of an Hour

Kate Chopin

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.

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Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" originally published 1894.

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will—as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been.

When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: "free, free, free!" The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial.

She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

"Free! Body and soul free!" she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. "Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door—you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door."

"Go away. I am not making myself ill." No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister's importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister's waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

Some one was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of the accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.

But Richards was too late.

When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills.

A DARK BROWN DOG by Stephan Crane

A Child was standing on a street-corner. He leaned with one shoulder against a high board-fence and swayed the other to and fro, the while kicking carelessly at the gravel. Sunshine beat upon the cobbles, and a lazy summer wind raised yellow dust which trailed in clouds down the avenue. Clattering trucks moved with indistinctness through it. The child stood dreamily gazing.

After a time, a little dark-brown dog came trotting with an intent air down the sidewalk. A short rope was dragging from his neck. Occasionally he trod upon the end of it and stumbled.

He stopped opposite the child, and the two regarded each other. The dog hesitated for a moment, but presently he made some little advances with his tail. The child put out his hand and called him. In an apologetic manner the dog came close, and the two had an interchange of friendly pattings and waggles. The dog became more enthusiastic with each moment of the interview, until with his gleeful caperings he threatened to overturn the child. Whereupon the child lifted his hand and struck the dog a blow upon the head.

This thing seemed to overpower and astonish the little dark-brown dog, and wounded him to the heart. He sank down in despair at the child's feet. When the blow was repeated, together with an admonition in childish sentences, he turned over upon his back, and held his paws in a peculiar manner. At the same time with his ears and his eyes he offered a small prayer to the child.

He looked so comical on his back, and holding his paws peculiarly, that the child was greatly amused and gave him little taps repeatedly, to keep him so. But the little dark-brown dog took this chastisement in the most serious way, and no doubt considered that he had committed some grave crime, for he wriggled contritely and showed his repentance in every way that was in his power. He pleaded with the child and petitioned him, and offered more prayers.

At last the child grew weary of this amusement and turned toward home. The dog was praying at the time. He lay on his back and turned his eyes upon the retreating form. Presently he struggled to his feet and started after the child. The latter wandered in a perfunctory way toward his home, stopping at times to investigate various matters. During one of these pauses he discovered the little dark-brown dog who was following him with the air of a footpad.

The child beat his pursuer with a small stick he had found. The dog lay down and prayed until the child had finished, and resumed his journey. Then he scrambled erect and took

On the way to his home the child turned many times and beat the dog, proclaiming with childish gestures that he held him in contempt as an unimportant dog, with no value save for a moment. For being this quality of animal the dog apologized and eloquently expressed regret, but he continued stealthily to follow the child. His manner grew so very guilty that he slunk like an assassin.

When the child reached his door-step, the dog was industriously ambling a few yards in the rear. He became so agitated with shame when he again confronted the child that he forgot the dragging rope. He tripped upon it and fell forward.

The child sat down on the step and the two had another interview. During it the dog greatly exerted himself to please the child. He performed a few gambols with such abandon that the child suddenly saw him to be a valuable thing. He made a swift, avaricious charge and seized the rope.

He dragged his captive into a hall and up many long stairways in a dark tenement. The dog made willing efforts, but he could not hobble very skilfully up the stairs because he was very small and soft, and at last the pace of the engrossed child grew so energetic that the dog became panic-stricken. In his mind he was being dragged toward a grim unknown. His eyes grew wild with the terror of it. He began to wiggle his head frantically and to brace his legs.

The child redoubled his exertions. They had a battle on the stairs. The child was victorious because he was completely absorbed in his purpose, and because the dog was very small. He dragged his acquirement to the door of his home, and finally with triumph across the threshold.

No one was in. The child sat down on the floor and made overtures to the dog. These the dog instantly accepted. He beamed with affection upon his new friend. In a short time they were firm and abiding comrades.

When the child's family appeared, they made a great row. The dog was examined and commented upon and called names. Scorn was leveled at him from all eyes, so that he became much embarrassed and drooped like a scorched plant. But the child went sturdily to the center of the floor, and, at the top of his voice, championed the dog. It happened that he was roaring protestations, with his arms clasped about the dog's neck, when the father of the family came in from work.

The parent demanded to know what the blazes they were making the kid howl for. It was explained in many words that the infernal kid wanted to introduce a disreputable dog into the family.

A family council was held. On this depended the dog's fate, but he in no way heeded, being busily engaged in chewing the end of the child's dress.

The affair was quickly ended. The father of the family, it appears, was in a particularly savage temper that evening, and when he perceived that it would amaze and anger everybody if such a dog were allowed to remain, he decided that it should be so. The child, crying softly, took his friend off to a retired part of the room to hobnob with him, while the father quelled a fierce rebellion of his wife. So it came to pass that the dog was a member of the household.

He and the child were associated together at all times save when the child slept. The child became a guardian and a friend. If the large folk kicked the dog and threw things at him, the child made loud and violent objections. Once when the child had run, protesting loudly, with tears raining down his face and his arms outstretched, to protect his friend, he had been struck in the head with a very large saucepan from the hand of his father, enraged at some seeming lack of courtesy in the dog. Ever after, the family were careful how they threw things at the dog. Moreover, the latter grew very skilful in avoiding missiles and feet. In a small room containing a stove, a table, a bureau and some chairs, he would display strategic ability of a high order, dodging, feinting and scuttling about among the furniture. He could force three or four people armed with brooms, sticks and handfuls of coal, to use all their ingenuity to get in a blow. And even when they did, it was seldom that they could do him a serious injury or leave any imprint.

But when the child was present, these scenes did not occur. It came to be recognized that if the dog was molested, the child would burst into sobs, and as the child, when started, was very riotous and practically unquenchable, the dog had therein a safeguard.

However, the child could not always be near. At night, when he was asleep, his dark-brown friend would raise from some black corner a wild, wailful cry, a song of infinite lowliness and despair, that would go shuddering and sobbing among the buildings of the block and cause people to swear. At these times the singer would often be chased all over the kitchen and hit with a great variety of articles.

Sometimes, too, the child himself used to beat the dog, although it is not known that he ever had what could be truly called a just cause. The dog always accepted these thrashings with an air of admitted guilt. He was too much of a dog to try to look to be a martyr or to plot revenge. He received the blows with deep humility, and furthermore he forgave his friend the moment the child had finished, and was ready to caress the child's hand with his little red tongue.

When misfortune came upon the child, and his troubles overwhelmed him, he would often crawl under the table and lay his small distressed head on the dog's back. The dog was ever sympathetic. It is not to be supposed that at such times he took occasion to refer to the unjust beatings his friend, when provoked, had administered to him.

He did not achieve any notable degree of intimacy with the other members of the family. He had no confidence in them, and the fear that he would express at their casual approach often exasperated them exceedingly. They used to gain a certain satisfaction in underfeeding him, but finally his friend the child grew to watch the matter with some care, and when he forgot it, the dog was often successful in secret for himself.

So the dog prospered. He developed a large bark, which came wondrously from such a small rug of a dog. He ceased to howl persistently at night. Sometimes, indeed, in his sleep, he would utter little yells, as from pain, but that occurred, no doubt, when in his dreams he encountered huge flaming dogs who threatened him direfully.

His devotion to the child grew until it was a sublime thing. He wagged at his approach; he sank down in despair at his departure. He could detect the sound of the child's step among all the noises of the neighborhood. It was like a calling voice to him.

The scene of their companionship was a kingdom governed by this terrible potentate, the child; but neither criticism nor rebellion ever lived for an instant in the heart of the one subject. Down in the mystic, hidden fields of his little dog- soul bloomed flowers of love and fidelity and perfect faith.

The child was in the habit of going on many expeditions to observe strange things in the vicinity. On these occasions his friend usually jogged aimfully along behind. Perhaps, though, he went ahead. This necessitated his turning around every quarter-minute to make sure the child was coming. He was filled with a large idea of the importance of these journeys. He would carry himself with such an air! He was proud to be the retainer of so great a monarch.

One day, however, the father of the family got quite exceptionally drunk. He came home and held carnival with the cooking utensils, the furniture and his wife. He was in the midst of this recreation when the child, followed by the dark-brown dog, entered the room. They were returning from their voyages.

The child's practised eye instantly noted his father's state. He dived under the table, where experience had taught him was a rather safe place. The dog, lacking skill in such matters, was, of course, unaware of the true condition of affairs. He looked with interested eyes at his friend's sudden dive. He interpreted it to mean: Joyous gambol. He started to patter across the floor to join him. He was the picture of a little dark-brown dog en route to a friend.

The head of the family saw him at this moment. He gave a huge howl of joy, and knocked the dog down with a heavy coffee-pot. The dog, yelling in supreme astonishment and fear, writhed to his feet and ran for cover. The man kicked out with a ponderous foot. It caused the dog to swerve as if caught in a tide. A second blow of the coffee-pot laid him upon the floor.

Here the child, uttering loud cries, came valiantly forth like a knight. The father of the family paid no attention to these calls of the child, but advanced with glee upon the dog. Upon being knocked down twice in swift succession, the latter apparently gave up all hope of escape. He rolled over on his back and held his paws in a peculiar manner. At the same time with his eyes and his ears he offered up a small prayer.

But the father was in a mood for having fun, and it occurred to him that it would be a fine thing to throw the dog out of the window. So he reached down and grabbing the animal by a leg, lifted him, squirming, up. He swung him two or three times hilariously about his head, and then flung him with great accuracy through the window.

The soaring dog created a surprise in the block. A woman watering plants in an opposite window gave an involuntary shout and dropped a flower-pot. A man in another window leaned perilously out to watch the flight of the dog. A woman, who had been hanging out clothes in a yard, began to caper wildly. Her mouth was filled with clothes-pins, but her arms gave vent to a sort of exclamation. In appearance she was like a gagged prisoner. Children ran whooping.

The dark-brown body crashed in a heap on the roof of a shed five stories below. From thence it rolled to the pavement of an alleyway.

The child in the room far above burst into a long, dirgelike cry, and toddled hastily out of the room. It took him a long time to reach the alley, because his size compelled him to go downstairs backward, one step at a time, and holding with both hands to the step above.

When they came for him later, they found him seated by the body of his dark-brown friend.



The Open Boat

N

ONE OF THEM KNEW THE COLOR OF THE SKY.

Their eyes glanced level, and remained upon the waves that swept toward them. These waves were gray, except for the tops, which were white, and all the men knew the colors of the sea. The line between sky and water narrowed and widened, and fell and rose.

A man likes to take a bath in a bigger area than this boat could provide. These waves were frightfully rapid and tall; and each boiling, white top was a problem in the small boat.

The cook sat in the bottom, and looked with both eyes at the six inches of boat which separated him from the ocean. He had bared his fat arms as he worked to empty the water from the boat. Often he said, "God! That was a bad one." As he remarked it, he always looked toward the east over the rough sea.

The **oiler**, guiding with one of the two **oars** in the boat, sometimes raised himself suddenly to keep away from the water that poured in. It was a thin little oar, and it often seemed ready to break.

The **correspondent**, pulling at the other oar, watched the waves and wondered why he was there.

The hurt captain, lying in the front, was feeling defeat and despair. It was despair that comes, for a time at least, to even the bravest and most enduring when the business fails, the army loses, the ship goes down. The mind of the master of a vessel is rooted deep in her wood, whether he commands for a day or many. And this captain had in his thoughts the firm impression of a scene in the grays of dawn, with seven faces turned down in the sea. And later the remains of the ship, washed by waves, going low and lower and down. Thereafter there was something strange in his voice. Although steady, it was deep with grief, and of a quality beyond speech or tears.

“Keep her a little more south, Billie,” said he.

“A little more south, sir,” said the oiler in the back.

A seat in this boat was not unlike a seat upon a jumpy horse, and a horse is not much smaller. The boat was much like an animal. As each wave came, and she rose for it, she seemed like a horse leaping over a high fence. The manner of her ride over these walls of water is a thing of mystery. Each wave required a new leap, and a leap from the air. Then jumping and slipping and racing and dropping down, she steadied for the next threat.

A particular danger of the sea is the fact that after successfully getting through one wave, you discover that there is another behind it. The next wave is just as nervously anxious and purposeful to overturn boats. In a ten-foot boat one can get a good idea of the great force of the sea. As each gray wall of water approached, it shut all else from the view of the men in the boat. It was not difficult to imagine that this particular wave was the final outburst of the ocean, the last effort of the determined water.

The sun climbed steadily up the sky. The men knew it was broad day because the color of the sea changed from gray to green and the

white tops were like falling snow. From their low boat they could not see the sun rise. Only the color of the waves that rolled toward them told them that day was breaking.

The oiler and the correspondent rowed the tiny boat. And they rowed. They sat together in the same seat, and each rowed an oar. Then the oiler took both oars; then the correspondent took both oars; then the oiler; then the correspondent. They rowed and they rowed.

The captain, hesitating in the front, after the boat had climbed a great wave, said that he had seen the light at Mosquito Inlet. After a while, the cook remarked that he had seen it. The correspondent was at the oars then and he, too, wished to look at the lighthouse. But his back was toward the far shore. The waves were important, and for some time he could not seize an opportunity to turn his head. But at last there came a wave more gentle than the others. When at the top of it, he hurriedly searched the western water with his eyes.

“See it?” asked the captain.

“No,” said the correspondent slowly, “I didn’t see anything.”

“Look again,” said the captain. He pointed. “It’s exactly in that direction.”

At the top of another wave the correspondent did as he was told. This time his eyes found a small, still thing on the edge of the moving ocean. It was exactly like the point of a pin. It took an anxious eye to find a lighthouse so tiny.

“Think we’ll reach it, Captain?”

“If this wind stays steady and the boat doesn’t sink, we can’t do much else,” said the captain hopefully. Then he added, “Empty her, cook.”

“All right, Captain,” said the cheerful cook.

It would be difficult to describe the secure bond between men that was here established on the seas. No one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. But it was on the boat, and each man felt it warm him. They were a captain, an oiler, a cook, and a correspondent, and they were friends—friends in a more strangely iron-bound strength than

may be ordinary.

The hurt captain, lying against the water jar in the front, spoke always in a low voice and calmly. But he could never command a more ready-to-obey ship's company than the other three in the boat. It was more than a mere recognition of what was best for their safety. There was surely in it a quality that was personal and heartfelt. And after this devotion to the commander of the boat, there was this oneness. The correspondent, who had been taught to be a hard judge of men, knew even at the time that it was the best experience of his life. But no one said it was so. No one mentioned it.

"I wish we had a sail," remarked the captain. "We might try my coat on the end of an oar. It would give you two boys a chance to rest." So the cook and the correspondent held the oar and spread wide the coat. Sometimes the oiler had to turn sharply to keep the sea from breaking into the boat. But, otherwise, sailing was a success.

The lighthouse had been growing slowly larger. It now almost had color and appeared like a little gray shadow on the sky. The men holding high the oar could not be prevented from turning their heads quite often to glance at this little gray shadow.

At last, from the top of each wave, the men in the rolling boat could see land. As the lighthouse was a shadow on the sky, this land seemed only a long black shadow on the sea. It certainly was thinner than paper.

The wind slowly died away. The cook and the correspondent did not now have to labor to hold high the oar. But the waves continued pushing and turning and washing the boat.

Slowly the land rose from the sea. From a black line it became a line of black and white—trees and sand. Finally the captain said he could see a house on the shore. "They'll see us before long and come out after us," said the cook.

The distant lighthouse rose high. "The keeper ought to be able to see us now," said the captain.

"None of those other boats could have reached shore to give word of our ship," said the oiler, in a low voice, "or the lifeboat would be out

hunting for us.”

Slowly and beautifully the land came out of the sea. The wind came again. Finally a new sound struck the ears of the men in the boat. It was the low thunder of waves beating the shore. “We’ll never be able to reach the lighthouse now,” said the captain. “Swing her a little more north, Billie.”

“A little more north, sir,” said the oiler.

So the little boat turned her nose once more down the wind. All except the oarsman watched the shore grow. Doubt and fear were leaving the minds of the men. The management of the boat still took most of their attention, but it could not prevent a quiet cheerfulness. In an hour, perhaps, they would be on shore. The nearness of success shone in their eyes. Everybody took a drink of water.

“Cook,” remarked the captain, “there doesn’t seem to be any sign of life about the house.”

“No,” replied the cook. “Strange they don’t see us.”

Tide, wind and waves were swinging the boat north. “Strange they don’t see us,” said the men.

The sea’s roar was here dulled, but its tone was nevertheless thundering and huge. As the boat swam over the great waves, the men sat listening to this roar. “We’ll overturn,” said everybody.

It is fair to say here that there was not a lifesaving station within twenty miles in either direction. But the men did not know this fact, and so they made bitter remarks concerning the eyesight of the nation’s lifesavers. Four unhappy men sat in the boat and murmured, “Strange they don’t see us.”

The earlier lightheartedness had completely disappeared. To their sharpened minds it was easy to imagine all kinds of idleness and blindness, and indeed, lack of courage. There was the shore of the land, and it was bitter and bitter to them that from it came no sign.

The captain said at last, “I suppose we’ll have to make a try for ourselves. If we stay out here too long, none of us will have strength to swim after the boat goes under.”

And so the oiler, who was at the oars, turned the boat straight for the shore. There was a sudden tightening of muscles. There was some thinking.

“If we don’t all get to shore,” said the captain, “—if we don’t all get to shore, I suppose you fellows know where to send news of my finish?”

Then they briefly exchanged some addresses and instructions. As for the thoughts of the men, there was a great deal of anger in them. They might be summed up this way: “If I am going to lose my life to the sea—if I am going to lose my life to the sea—why was I allowed to come this far to see sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to taste the holy food of life?”

“It is crazy. If this old fool woman, Fate, cannot do better than this, she should be forced from the management of men’s fortunes. She is an old chicken who knows not her purposes. If she has decided to kill me, why did she not do it in the beginning and save me all this trouble? The whole affair is mad—but no; she cannot mean to kill me. She dare not. She cannot. Not after all this work.” And then each man might have had the urge to shout at the clouds. “Just kill me now, and then hear what I call you!”

The waves that came at this time were more fierce. They seemed always to break and roll over the little boat in a mass of boiling white and gray. The shore was still far away. The oiler was a wise seaman. “Boys,” he cried out, “she won’t live three minutes more, and we’re too far out to swim. Shall I take her to sea again, Captain?”

“Yes, go ahead!” said the captain.

The oiler, by a series of quick movements, great skill, and fast and steady work with the oars, turned the boat in the middle of the tide and took her to sea again.

There was a long silence as the boat rose and dropped over the rough sea to deeper water. Then somebody slowly spoke: “Well, they must have seen us from shore by now.”

“What do you think of those lifesaving people?”

“Strange they haven’t seen us.”

“Maybe they think we are out here for sport! Maybe they think

we're fishing. Maybe they think we are fools."

It was a long afternoon. A changed tide tried to force them south, but wind and wave said north. Far ahead, where coastline, sea and sky met, there were little dots which seemed to indicate a city on the shore.

"St. Augustine?"

The captain shook his head. "Too near Mosquito Inlet."

And the oiler rowed, and the correspondent rowed. It was a tiring business.

"Did you ever like to row, Billie?" asked the correspondent.

"No," said the oiler, "I hate it!"

When one exchanged the rowing seat for a place in the bottom of the boat, he suffered a bodily experience that caused him to be careless of everything except an obligation to move one finger. There was cold sea water washing back and forth in the boat, and he lay in it. His head was pillowed on wood within an inch of the waves along the side. Sometimes the sea came in and bathed him once more. But this did not trouble him. It is almost certain that if the boat had sunk he would have fallen comfortably out upon the ocean as if it were a great soft bed.

"Look! There's a man on the shore!"

"Where?"

"There! See him? See him?"

"Yes, sure! He's walking along."

"Now he's stopped. Look! He's facing us!"

"He's waving at us!"

"So he is! By thunder!"

"Now we're all right! Now we're all right! There'll be a boat out here for us in half an hour."

"He's going on. He's running. He's going up to that house there."

The distant beach seemed lower than the sea, and required a searching glance to see the little black figure! The captain saw a floating stick, and they rowed to it. A white cloth was by some strange chance in the boat. Tying this on the stick, the captain waved it. The man at the oars did not dare turn his head, so he was obliged to ask questions.

"What's he doing now?"

“He’s standing still again. He’s looking, I think. There he goes again—toward the house. Now he’s stopping again.”

“Is he waving at us?”

“No, not now; he was, though.”

“Look! There comes another man!”

“He’s running.”

“Look at him go!”

“Look! There’s a fellow waving a little black flag. I’ve never seen anyone wave so hard! There come those other two fellows. Now they are talking together. Look at the fellow with the flag. I’ve never seen anyone wave so hard!”

“That isn’t a flag, is it? That’s his coat. Certainly, that’s his coat.”

“So it is; it’s his coat! He’s taken it off and is waving around his head. But would you look at him swing it!”

“What does that fool with the coat mean? What’s he signaling anyhow?”

“It looks as if he were trying to tell us to go north. There must be a lifesaving station up there.”

“No, he thinks we’re fishing. Just giving us a merry hand. See? There, Billie.”

“I wish I could understand those signals. What do you suppose he means?”

“He doesn’t mean anything; he’s just playing.”

“Well, if he’d just signal us to try again; or to go to sea and wait; or go north, or go south, or go to hell, there would be some reason in it. But look at him! He stands there and keeps his coat turning around like a wheel. The fool!”

“There come some more people.”

“Now there’s quite a mob. Look! Isn’t that a boat?”

“Where? Oh, I see where you mean. No, that’s no boat.”

“That fellow is still waving his coat.”

“He must think we like to see him do that. Why doesn’t he stop it? It doesn’t mean anything.”

“I don’t know. I think he is trying to make us go north. There

must be a lifesaving station there somewhere.”

“He isn’t tired yet. Look at him wave!”

“I wonder how long he can do that. He’s been swinging his coat around ever since he caught sight of us. He’s crazy. Why aren’t they getting men to bring a boat out? A fishing boat could come out here all right. Why won’t he do something?”

“Oh, it’s all right now.”

“They’ll have a boat out here for us soon, now that they have seen us.”

A faint yellow color came into the sky over the low land. The shadows on the sea slowly deepened. The wind brought coldness with it, and the men felt it.

“My God!” said one, allowing his voice to express his feeling. “If we have to wait around out here! If we’ve got to stay out here all night!”

“Oh, we’ll never have to stay here all night! Don’t worry! They’ve seen us now, and they’ll come out after us soon.”

The shore grew dark. The man waving the coat and the group of people gradually became part of this darkness.

“I’d like to catch the one who waved the coat. I feel like hitting him hard, just for luck.”

“Why? What did he do?”

“Oh, nothing, but he seemed so—cheerful!”

And so the oiler rowed, and then the correspondent rowed, and then the oiler rowed. Gray-faced and bent forward steadily, turn by turn, they lifted the heavy oars. The form of the lighthouse was gone from their view, but finally a pale star appeared, just lifting from the sea.

“If I am going to lose my life to the sea—if I am going to lose my life to the sea—why was I allowed to come this far and see sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to taste the holy food of life?”

The patient captain, leaning against the water jar, was sometimes obliged to speak to the oarsman.

“Keep her head up! Keep her head up!”

“Keep her head up, sir.” The voices were tired and low.

This was surely a quiet evening. All except the oarsman lay heavily motionless in the boat's bottom.

A night on the sea in an open boat is a long night. As darkness fell, the shine of the light, lifting from the sea in the south, changed to full gold. In the north, a new light appeared—a small blue glow on the edge of the waters. These two lights were the furniture of the world. Otherwise there was nothing but waves.

The plan of the oiler and the correspondent was for one to row until he was no longer able. Then he would wake the other from his dead sleep in the bottom of the boat.

The oiler worked the oars until his head dropped forward and the overpowering sleep blinded him; and he rowed some more. Then he touched a man in the bottom of the boat, and called his name, "Will you row for a little while?" he asked softly.

"Sure, Billie," said the correspondent, slowly dragging himself to a sitting position. They exchanged places carefully. And the oiler, slipping down in the sea water at the cook's side, seemed to go to sleep instantly. Though the huge size of the waves had lessened, they still rolled the boat high. The man at the oars tried to keep her pointing into the waves so she would not turn over. The black waves were silent and hard to see in the darkness. Often one was almost upon the boat before the oarsman knew it.

In a low voice the correspondent spoke to the captain. He was not sure that the captain was awake, although this iron man seemed to be always awake. "Captain, shall I keep her going toward that light north, sir!"

The same steady voice answered him. "Yes. Keep the light a little to the left."

The correspondent, as he rowed, looked down at the two men sleeping underfoot. The cook's arm was around the oiler's shoulders, and with their scarce clothing and tired faces, they were the babies of the sea—a strange picture of two old babies.

After a time it seemed that even the captain slept, and the cor-

respondent thought that he was the only man afloat on all the ocean. The wind had a voice as it came over the waves, and it was sadder than death.

“If I am going to lose my life to the sea—if I am going to lose my life to the sea—why was I allowed to come this far and see sand and trees?”

During the long night, a man might decide that it was really the purpose of the seven mad gods to kill him in spite of the awful cruelty of it. But it was certainly not justice to kill a man who had worked so hard, so hard. The man felt it would be a crime. Other people had died at sea since the beginning of ships, but still—

Later the correspondent spoke into the bottom of the boat. “Billie!” There was a slow and gradual movement. “Billie, would you row for a while?”

“Sure,” said the oiler.

As soon as the correspondent touched the cold, comfortable sea water in the bottom of the boat and had pressed close to the cook’s side, he was deep in sleep in spite of the cold. This sleep was so good to him that it was but a moment before he heard a voice call his name in a tone that showed great weakness. “Will you row now?”

“Sure, Billie.”

The light in the north had strangely disappeared, but the wide-awake captain told the correspondent how to go.

Later in the night, they took the boat farther out to sea. The captain told the cook to take one oar at the rear and keep the boat facing the seas. This plan enabled the oiler and correspondent to rest together. “We’ll give those boys a chance to gather some strength,” said the captain.

They curled down and slept once more the dead sleep.

When the correspondent again opened his eyes, the sea and the sky were each of the gray color of dawn. Later, pink and gold light shone upon the waters. The morning appeared finally, in its splendid form—a sky of pure blue, and the sunlight flamed on the tips of the waves.

On the distant sands were many little black houses, and a tall,

white windmill rose above them. No man nor dog appeared on the beach. It might have been a deserted village.

The voyagers searched the shore with their eyes. They considered their position. The captain said, "If no help is coming, we might better try to reach land right away. If we stay out here much longer we will be too weak to do anything for ourselves at all." The others silently agreed to this reasoning.

The boat was going toward the beach. The correspondent wondered if anyone ever climbed the tall wind tower, and if, then, he ever looked at the sea. This tower was a giant, standing with its back to the danger of small creatures. It represented to the correspondent the calm of Nature against the struggles of the individual—Nature in the wind, and Nature in the sight of men. Nature did not seem cruel to him then, nor kind, nor dangerous, nor wise. But she was not interested, completely not interested.

It is, perhaps, probable that a man in this situation, impressed with the lack of concern of the world, should see the many faults in his own life. They may rest badly in his mind, and he may wish for another chance. The difference between right and wrong seems all too clear to him then. And he understands that if he were given another opportunity, he would improve his conduct and his words.

"Now, boys," said the captain, "she is going to go under. All we can do is take her in as far as possible, and then when she sinks, jump out and go toward the beach. Keep cool now, and don't jump until she goes under."

The oiler took the oars. "Captain," he said, "I think I'd better keep her head to the seas and back her in."

"All right, Billie," said the captain. "Back her in." The oiler turned the boat then and, seated in the rear, the cook and the correspondent had to look over their shoulders to see the lonely and distant shore.

The huge waves lifted the boat high. "We won't get in very close," said the captain. Each time a man could turn his attention from the sea, he glanced toward the shore, and in the expression of the eyes there was a remarkable quality. The correspondent, observing the others, knew

that they were not afraid, but the full meaning of their glances was hidden.

As for himself, he was too tired to fully understand the fact. He tried to force his mind into thinking of it, but the mind was slave now to the muscles. And the muscles said they did not care. He merely thought that if he should die it would be a shame.

There were no hurried words, no apparent fears. The men simply looked at the shore. "Now remember to get well away from the boat when you jump," said the captain.

A wave suddenly fell with a thundering roar, and the water came rushing down upon the boat.

"Steady, now," said the captain. The men were silent. They turned their eyes from the shore and waited. Then the next wave broke upon them. Rolling floods of white water caught the boat and whipped it around. Water came in from all sides.

The little boat, dying under this weight of water, sank deeper into the sea.

"Empty her out, cook! Empty her out!" said the captain.

"All right, Captain," said the cook.

"Now, boys, the next one will finish us," said the oiler. "Remember to jump free of the boat."

The third wave moved forward—huge, angry, merciless. It seemed to drink the tiny boat and, at the same time, threw the men into the sea.

The January water was icy. The correspondent thought immediately that it was colder than he had expected to find it off the coast of Florida. This appeared to his dulled mind as a matter important enough to be noted at the time. The coldness of the water was sad; it was very sad. This fact was somehow mixed with opinion of his own situation, so that it seemed almost a proper reason for tears. The water was cold.

When he came to the surface, he knew of little but the noisy water. Afterward he saw his companions in the sea. The oiler was ahead in the race. He was swimming strongly and rapidly. Off to the correspondent's left, cook's great back appeared out of the water. Behind him the captain was hanging with his one unhurt hand to the overturned boat.

There is a certain motionless quality to a shore, and the correspondent wondered that it could exist so near the awful sea. It seemed very desirable. But the correspondent knew that it was a long journey, and he swam slowly.

But finally he arrived at a place in the sea where travel was difficult. He did not stop swimming to consider what kind of current had caught him, but there his progress ceased. The shore was before him, and he looked at it and understood with his eyes each detail of it.

As the cook passed, much farther to the left, the captain was calling to him, "Turn over on your back, cook! Turn over on your back and use the oar."

"All right, sir." The cook turned on his back and, using the oar, went ahead as if he were a boat himself.

The boat also passed, with the captain holding on with one hand.

They passed nearer to shore—the oiler, the cook, the captain—and following them went the water jar, sailing merrily over the sea.

The correspondent remained in the grasp of this strange new enemy—a current. The shore, with its white sand and green trees, was spread like a picture before him.

He thought: "I'm going to die. Can it be possible? Can it be possible? Can it be possible?" Perhaps an individual must consider his own death to be the final act of Nature.

But later a wave pushed him out of this small, deadly current, and he found suddenly that he could again make progress toward the shore. Later still he knew that the captain had his face turned toward him and was calling his name. "Come to the boat! Come to the boat!"

In his struggle to reach the captain and the boat, he realized that when one gets tired beyond limit, death must be comfortable—an end of fighting accompanied by a large sense of relief.

After a while he saw a man running along the shore. He was removing his clothes with most remarkable speed. Coat, trousers, shirt, everything came off him like magic.

"Come to the boat!" called the captain.

"All right, Captain." As the correspondent swam, he saw the cap-

tain stand on the floor of the ocean and leave the boat. Then the correspondent performed his one bit of magic of the voyage. A large wave caught him and threw him with ease and speed completely over the boat and far beyond it. He was amazed by his own performance and by that of the marvelous sea.

The correspondent arrived in water that reached only to his chest, but his condition did not enable him to stand for more than a moment. Each wave pushed him down again.

Then he saw the running man come leaping into the water. He dragged ashore the cook; and then went toward the captain; but the captain motioned him away and sent him to the correspondent. The man gave a strong pull, a long drag, and a big push. The correspondent said, "Thanks, old man." But suddenly the man cried, "What's that?" He pointed a quick finger. The correspondent said, "Go."

In the low water, face down, lay the oiler. His forehead touched sand that was sometimes, between each wave, above the sea.

The correspondent did not know all that happened afterward. When he reached safe ground he fell, striking the sand with each part of his body. It was as if he had dropped from a roof.

It seemed that instantly the beach was crowded with men bringing blankets and clothes, and with women carrying coffee. The welcome of the land to the sea was warm and generous. But a quiet and wet shape was carried up the beach. And the land's welcome for it could only be the different and silent one of the grave.

When night came, the white waves rolled back and forth in the moonlight, and the wind brought the sound of the great sea's voice to the men on the shore. And they felt that they could then understand.

Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914)

The Boarded Window

Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914) was an American writer, journalist, critic, and satirist. He is best known for his short story “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” (1890), collected in his *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891), and *The Devil’s Dictionary* (1906), a satiric and cynical book of definitions. For example, he defined *Presidency* as “The greased pig in the field game of American politics.” Bierce disappeared in Mexico in 1914 while covering the Mexican Revolution. “The Boarded Window: An Incident in the life of an Ohio Pioneer,” was published in *The San Francisco Examiner* in 1891 and collected in *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* in the same year. National Public Radio broadcast an adaptation of “The Boarded Window” on *Radio Tales* in 2001.

In 1830, only a few miles away from what is now the great city of Cincinnati, lay an immense and almost unbroken forest. The whole region was sparsely settled by people of the frontier—restless souls who no sooner had hewn fairly habitable homes out of the wilderness and attained to that degree of prosperity which today we should call indigence, then, impelled by some mysterious impulse of their nature, they abandoned all and pushed farther westward, to encounter new perils and privations in the effort to regain the meager comforts which they had voluntarily renounced. Many of them had already forsaken that region for the remoter settlements, but among those remaining was one who had been of those first arriving. He lived alone in a house of logs surrounded on all sides by the great forest, of whose gloom and silence he seemed a part, for no one had ever known him to smile nor speak a needless word. His simple wants were supplied by the sale or barter of skins of wild animals in the river town, for not a thing did he grow upon the land which, if needful, he might have claimed by right of undisturbed possession. There were evidences of “improvement”—a few acres of ground immediately about the house had once been cleared of its trees, the decayed stumps of which were half concealed by the new growth that had been suffered to repair the ravage wrought by the ax. Apparently the man's zeal for agriculture had burned with a failing flame, expiring in penitential ashes.

The little log house, with its chimney of sticks, its roof of warping clapboards weighted with traversing poles and its “chinking” of clay, had a single door and, directly opposite, a window. The latter, however, was boarded up—nobody could remember a time when it was not. And none knew why it was so closed; certainly not because of the occupant's dislike of light and air, for on those rare occasions when a hunter had passed that lonely spot the recluse had commonly been seen sunning himself on his doorstep if heaven had provided sunshine for his need. I fancy there are few persons living today who ever knew the secret of that window, but I am one, as you shall see.

The man's name was said to be Murlock. He was apparently seventy years old, actually about fifty. Something besides years had had a hand in his aging. His hair and long, full beard were white, his gray, lusterless eyes sunken, his face singularly seamed with wrinkles which appeared to belong to two intersecting systems. In figure he was tall and spare, with a stoop of the shoulders—a burden bearer. I never saw him; these particulars I learned from my grandfather, from whom also I got the man's story when I was a lad. He had known him when living nearby in that early day.

One day Murlock was found in his cabin, dead. It was not a time and place for coroners and newspapers, and I suppose it was agreed that he had died from natural causes or I should have been told, and should remember. I know only that with what was probably a sense of the fitness of things the body was buried near the cabin, alongside the grave of his wife, who had preceded him by so many years that local tradition had retained hardly a hint of her existence. That closes the final chapter of this true story—excepting, indeed, the circumstance that many years afterward, in company with an equally intrepid spirit, I penetrated to the place and ventured near enough to the ruined cabin to throw a stone against it, and ran away to avoid the ghost which every well-informed boy thereabout knew haunted the spot. But there is an earlier chapter—that supplied by my grandfather.

When Murlock built his cabin and began laying sturdily about with his ax to hew out a farm—the rifle, meanwhile, his means of support—he was young, strong and full of hope. In that eastern country whence he came he had married, as was the fashion, a young woman in all ways worthy of his honest devotion, who shared the dangers and privations of his lot with a willing spirit and light heart. There is no known record of her name; of her charms of mind and person tradition is silent and the doubter is at liberty to entertain his doubt; but God forbid that I should share it! Of their affection and happiness there is abundant assurance in every added day of the man's widowed life; for what but the magnetism of a blessed memory could have chained that venturesome spirit to a lot like that?

One day Murlock returned from gunning in a distant part of the forest to find his wife prostrate with fever, and delirious. There was no physician within miles, no neighbor; nor was she in a condition to be left, to summon help. So he set about the task of nursing her back to health, but at the end of the third day she fell into unconsciousness and so passed away, apparently, with never a gleam of returning reason.

From what we know of a nature like his we may venture to sketch in some of the details of the outline picture drawn by my grandfather. When convinced that she was dead, Murlock had sense enough to remember that the dead must be prepared for burial. In performance of this sacred duty he blundered now and again, did certain things incorrectly, and others which he did correctly were done over and over. His occasional failures to accomplish some simple and ordinary act filled him with astonishment, like that of a drunken man who wonders at the suspension of familiar natural laws. He was surprised, too, that he did not weep—surprised and a little ashamed; surely it is unkind not to weep for the dead. “Tomorrow,” he said aloud, “I shall have to make the coffin arid dig the grave; and then I shall miss her, when she is no longer in sight; but now—she is dead, of course, but it is all right—it must be all right, somehow. Things cannot be so bad as they seem.”

He stood over the body in the fading light, adjusting the hair and putting the finishing touches to the simple toilet, doing all mechanically, with soulless care. And still through his consciousness ran an undersense of conviction that all was right—that he should have her again as before, and everything explained. He had had no experience in grief; his capacity had not been enlarged by use. His heart could not contain it all, nor his imagination rightly conceive it. He did not know he was so hard struck; that knowledge would come later, and never go. Grief is an artist of powers as various as the instruments upon which he plays his dirges for the dead, evoking from some the sharpest, shrillest notes, from others the low, grave chords that throb recurrent like the slow beating of a distant drum. Some natures it startles; some it stupefies. To one it comes like the stroke of an arrow, stinging all the sensibilities to a keener life; to another

as the blow of a bludgeon, which in crushing benumbs. We may conceive Murlock to have been that way affected, for (and here we are upon surer ground than that of conjecture) no sooner had he finished his pious work than, sinking into a chair by the side of the table upon which the body lay, and noting how white the profile showed in the deepening gloom, he laid his arms upon the table's edge, and dropped his face into them, tearless yet and unutterably weary. At that moment came in through the open window a long, wailing sound like the cry of a lost child in the far deeps of the darkening woods! But the man did not move. Again, and nearer than before, sounded that unearthly cry upon his failing sense. Perhaps it was a wild beast; perhaps it was a dream. For Murlock was asleep.

Some hours later, as it afterward appeared, this unfaithful watcher awoke and lifting his head from his arms intently listened—he knew not why. There in the black darkness by the side of the dead, recalling all without a shock, he strained his eyes to see—he knew not what. His senses were all alert, his breath was suspended, his blood had stilled its tides as if to assist the silence. Who—what had waked him, and where was it?

Suddenly the table shook beneath his arms, and at the same moment he heard, or fancied that he heard, a light, soft step—another—sounds as of bare feet upon the floor!

He was terrified beyond the power to cry out or move. Perforce he waited—waited there in the darkness through seeming centuries of such dread as one may know, yet live to tell. He tried vainly to speak the dead woman's name, vainly to stretch forth his hand across the table to learn if she were there. His throat was powerless, his arms and hands were like lead. Then occurred something most frightful. Some heavy body seemed hurled against the table with an impetus that pushed it against his breast so sharply as nearly to overthrow him, and at the same instant he heard and felt the fall of something upon the floor with so violent a thump that the whole house was shaken by the impact. A scuffling ensued, and a confusion of sounds impossible to describe. Murlock had risen to his feet. Fear had by excess forfeited control of his faculties. He flung his hands upon the table. Nothing was there!

There is a point at which terror may turn to madness; and madness incites to action. With no definite intent, from no motive but the wayward impulse of a madman, Murlock sprang to the wall, with a little groping seized his loaded rifle, and without aim discharged it. By the flash which lit up the room with a vivid illumination, he saw an enormous panther dragging the dead woman toward the window, its teeth fixed in her throat! Then there were darkness blacker than before, and silence; and when he returned to consciousness the sun was high and the wood vocal with songs of birds.

The body lay near the window, where the beast had left it when frightened away by the flash and report of the rifle. The clothing was deranged, the long hair in disorder, the limbs lay anyhow. From the throat, dreadfully lacerated, had issued a pool of blood not yet entirely coagulated. The ribbon with which he had bound the wrists was broken; the hands were tightly clenched. Between the teeth was a fragment of the animal's ear.