

THE STORYTELLER

Based on the short story by Saki



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The railway carriage was terribly hot. The next stop was almost an hour away. In the carriage were two small girls, and a small boy. The children's aunt sat in one corner seat. In another corner sat a bachelor who was not part of their group. The aunt and the children kept talking in an annoying way. Most of what the aunt said started with "Don't," and almost everything the children said began with "Why?" **A**

10 "Don't, Cyril," cried the aunt, as the small boy hit the seat cushions. The child moved to the window. "Where are those sheep going?" he asked.

"They are going to another field where there is more grass," said the aunt.

"But there is lots of grass in that field," protested the boy.

"Perhaps the grass in the other field is better," suggested the aunt. She tried to change the subject. "Oh, look at those cows!"

"Why is the grass in the other field better?" persisted Cyril. **B**

The bachelor scowled. He was a hard, mean man, the aunt thought.

20 The smaller girl began to recite a poem. She only knew the first line, but she repeated it over and over. The bachelor scowled toward them again.

A HERE'S HOW

Literary Focus

I can already tell that this story has an **omniscient narrator**. I know this because the narrator has told me that "the children kept talking in an annoying way." No character said or thought this, so it is the observation of an omniscient narrator.

B HERE'S HOW

Vocabulary

I do not know the word *persisted* in line 16. I do know that the boy is asking a lot of questions, even after his aunt changes the subject. *Persisted* must have something to do with not giving up. I checked my dictionary and *persisted* means "stubbornly continued."

A YOUR TURN

Literary Focus

Re-read lines 20–29. Underline any details that prove there is an **omniscient narrator**. How is the narrator giving you a better idea of the aunt’s personality?

B QUICK CHECK

How did the bachelor end up telling the children a story?

C HERE’S HOW

Reading Focus

I can see that the children’s attitudes in lines 41–48 change. The change happens once the bachelor describes the girl in his story as “horribly good.” I think the **writer’s purpose** here is to show me that the bachelor knows exactly what the children do and do not want to hear.

D HERE’S HOW

Language Coach

I know the word *park* can have **multiple meanings**. It can be a verb, as it is in the phrase, “Park your car.” Here, I think it is a noun, meaning “an area of land for recreation.”

“Come listen to a story,” said the aunt. In a low voice, she told an uninteresting story about a good little girl who made friends with everyone. The little girl was finally saved from a mad bull by rescuers who admired her moral goodness.

“Wouldn’t they have saved her if she hadn’t been good?” asked one girl. It was exactly the question that the bachelor wanted to ask. **A**

30 “Well, yes,” admitted the aunt.

“It’s the stupidest story I’ve ever heard,” said the bigger girl.

“You don’t seem to be a success as a storyteller,” said the bachelor.

“It’s very difficult to tell stories for children,” answered the aunt.

“I don’t agree with you,” said the bachelor.

“Perhaps you would like to tell them a story,” said aunt.

“Tell us a story,” begged the bigger girl.

40 “Once upon a time,” began the bachelor, “there was a little girl called Bertha, who was very, very good.” **B**

The children were instantly bored. It seemed as if all stories were alike.

“She did everything that she was told,” said the bachelor.

“She always told the truth. She kept her clothes clean, learned her lessons perfectly, and had beautiful manners. In fact, she was horribly good.”

Suddenly the story seemed more interesting. The word horrible in connection with goodness was new and surprising. **C**

50 “She was so good,” continued the bachelor, “that she won several medals for goodness. She always wore them pinned onto her dress. There was a medal for doing as she was told, another medal for being on time, and a third for good behavior. No other child in town had three medals, so everybody knew that she must be an extra good child.”

“Horribly good,” repeated Cyril.

“Everybody talked about her goodness. The Prince heard about it, and invited her to walk in his park.” **D** It was a beautiful

park, and no children were ever allowed in it. So it was a great honor for Bertha.”

60 “Were there any sheep in the park?” demanded Cyril.

“No,” said the bachelor, “there were no sheep in the park, but there were lots of little pigs.”

“What color were they?”

“Black with white faces, white with black spots, black all over, gray with white patches, and some were white all over.”

“Bertha was sorry that there were no flowers in the park. She had promised her aunts that she would not pick any of the Prince’s flowers. So it made her feel silly to find that there were no flowers to pick.” **E**

70 “Why weren’t there any flowers?”

“The pigs had eaten them all,” answered the bachelor. “You can’t have both pigs and flowers, so the Prince decided to have just pigs.”

The children liked the Prince’s choice. Most people would have preferred flowers. **F**

80 “In the park there were ponds with gold and blue and green fish. There were trees with parrots that said clever things, and hummingbirds that hummed popular tunes. Bertha thought to herself: ‘If I were not so very good I would not have been invited to this beautiful park.’ Her three medals clinked against one another as she walked. They reminded her how very good she really was. Just then an enormous wolf came into the park to see if it could catch a fat little pig for supper.” **G**

“What color was the wolf?” asked the children.

90 “Mud-color, with a black tongue and gray eyes. The first thing that it saw in the park was Bertha. Her dress was so white and clean that it could be seen from a great distance. Bertha saw the wolf and began to wish that she had never come into the park. She ran as hard as she could until she reached some bushes where she could hide. As the wolf came toward the branches, Bertha was terrified. She thought: ‘If I had not been so very good I would be safe in town.’ The bushes were so thick that the wolf couldn’t see her. Bertha was trembling with fear, however. As she

E YOUR TURN

Literary Focus

As he tells the story about Bertha, the bachelor is actually acting as an **omniscient narrator**. Re-read lines 49–69. Circle key words or phrases that prove that the bachelor is an omniscient narrator.

F YOUR TURN

Reading Focus

Why does the bachelor fill the park with pigs instead of flowers? Does his choice of pigs seem to fit with the **writer’s purpose** from the previous page? Explain your answer.

G HERE’S HOW

Reading Focus

I think the bachelor is making fun of Bertha and how good she is. Earlier in the story, I felt that the **writer’s purpose** was to make fun of the aunt. Maybe Saki has the bachelor tell the story about Bertha to mock the way adults expect children to act.

A YOUR TURN

Vocabulary

Look at the word *undermined* in line 105. You can tell that the aunt is not pleased with the bachelor's story. Knowing this, what do you think *undermined* means here?

B LITERARY ANALYSIS

What was the bachelor's purpose in telling the story he told? Is it possible that he had more than one purpose? Explain your answer.

trembled, her medals clinked against each other. The wolf heard the sound of the medals clinking. He found Bertha, dragged her out and ate her up. All that was left were her shoes, bits of clothing, and the three medals for goodness.”

“Were any of the little pigs killed?”

“No, they all escaped.”

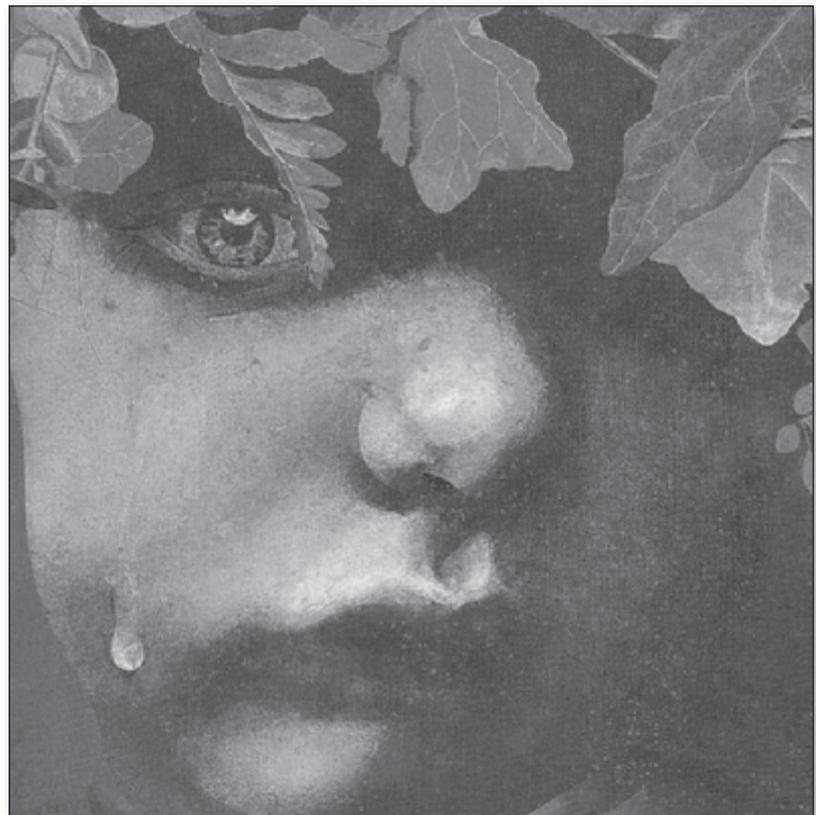
100 “The story began badly,” said the smaller girl, “but it had a beautiful ending.”

“It is the most beautiful story that I ever heard,” said the bigger girl.

The aunt disagreed. “What an improper story to tell children! You have undermined years of careful teaching.” **A**

“At any rate,” said the bachelor, “I kept them quiet for ten minutes, which was more than you could do.” He gathered his belongings and left the train.

110 “Poor woman!” he thought as he walked away. “Now those children will always be begging her in public for an improper story!” **B**



Fairy Child Crying, (1968–1969) by Peter Blake, watercolor.