

LESSON 4



THE OPEN WINDOW

You must have read stories of suspense and elements of surprise. You must have seen movies too. Can you name some of them ? This story is also about a young man, who faces some elements of surprise and suspense. Read the story and experience it yourself !

When Framton Nuttel had a nervous breakdown, his doctors ordered him complete rest in a quiet spot somewhere in the country. “I know just the place,” his sister told him, “the village I stayed in four years ago. It’s a lovely restful place on the edge of the moors. You’ll like it, and it’ll do you a lot of good.”

Framton looked doubtful.

“I met some very nice people when I was there,” his sister went on cheerfully, “and I’ll give you letters of introduction to them. Do go to see them. If you don’t, you’ll be lonely, and that will make you feel worse. Be sure and see Mrs. Sappleton. She’s such a kind person, and she’ll make you feel so much at home.”

So, Framton Nuttel went to stay in the country, in the village that his sister had recommended. And one afternoon he paid a visit to Mrs. Sappleton. The maid showed him into the drawing room where he sat. Feeling rather lost, he saw a young girl of about fifteen come in. “My

aunt will be coming down very soon,” she said. “In the meantime, I hope that you will try to bear my company.” She spoke in a grown-up manner, and seemed the very opposite of shy.

Framton smiled at her politely but found nothing to say. They sat in silence until she asked, “Do you know many of the people living here ?”

“No, I don’t know anyone, but my sister has given me letters of introduction to quite a number of people whom she met when she was on holiday here, four years ago.”

“Then you don’t know anything about my aunt ?” went on the young lady.

“Only her name and address,” said Framton. His eyes strayed round the room, searching for something that would tell him more about the lady and possibly her husband. He wondered whether the husband was alive or dead.

“Her great sorrow came just three years ago,” said the young lady. “That was after your sister’s holiday here, and so I suppose she never came to hear of it.”

“Her sorrow ?” asked Framton in a tone of surprise, for sorrow seemed to be out of place in this lively, peaceful spot.

“You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon,” said the girl, and she pointed to a long window that opened like a door on to the wide lawn outside.

“The weather’s very mild for this time of the year,” replied Framton, “but has that window got anything to do with your aunt’s sorrow ?

“It has,” she told him gravely. “Out through that window, three years ago today, her husband and her two young brothers went off to the moors for a day’s shooting.” Her voice dropped to a low sad tone as she added, “They never came back.”

“They never came back ? What do you mean ?” asked Framton in astonishment and alarm.

“They never came back,” she repeated in a shaking voice. “On their way across the moors, they fell into a bog and were simply swallowed up – all three of them, and their dog as well. There are a lot of bogs on the moors but, most years, they aren’t dangerous. That year they were, because of the terrible amount of rain we’d had that summer. Perhaps you remember ?”

“Well ...er ... yes,” said Framton, who did not remember at all but who was anxious to hear the rest of the sad story.

“Their bodies were never found. That was the worst part of it,” the sad voice went on. “Poor aunt thinks that they’ll come back one day – they and their little brown dog. All the time, she’s expecting them to walk in through that window as they always used to. That is why she leaves the window open even on cold days until it gets dark.”

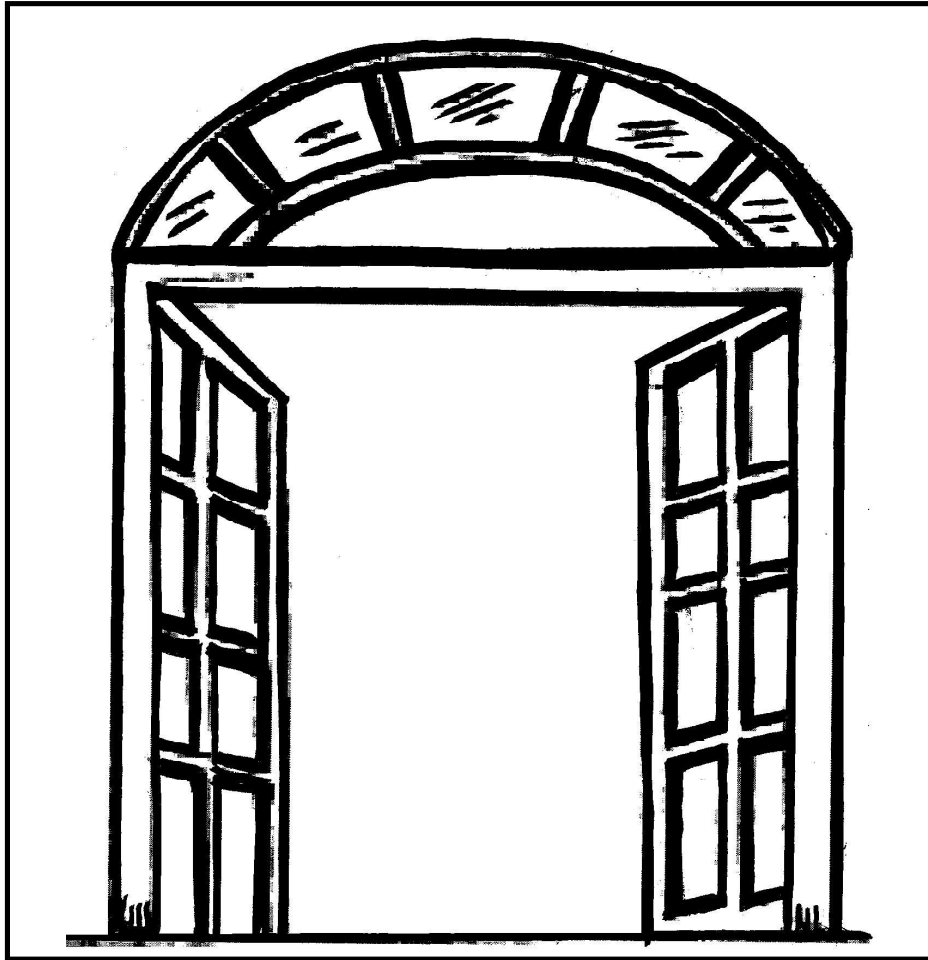
“Oh ...,” said Framton, feeling quite upset but unable to find the words that would express what he felt.

“Poor dear aunt! How often she has told me how they left the house that terrible day! Her husband was carrying his white raincoat over his right shoulder and Ronnie, her youngest brother, was singing a song – to annoy her because his singing always got on her nerves.” Here she paused and Framton was silent, feeling tongue-tied in front of this tragedy.

“Do you know,” she continued, “on quite evenings like this, I can’t help but feel that they will all walk in through that window....” She stopped and Framton saw that she was trembling. It was a relief to him when Mrs. Sappleton came into the room and apologised for keeping him waiting.

“She has been very interesting,” said Framton.

“Please don’t mind the window being open,” said Mrs. Sappleton brightly. “My husband and my two brothers will be home at any time now. They’ve been out all day, shooting on the moors, and they always come in this way. The ground’s very boggy and they are sure to come in all covered with mud. They quite spoil my carpets with their muddy boots. But men never bother about such things, do they ?”



She went on talking about shooting and how scarce the birds were that autumn. To Framton it was all quite terrible, and he could hardly bear to listen to the poor lady, who was clearly out of her mind. He made a great effort to turn her thoughts to a more cheerful subject, but he did not succeed in doing so.

All the time that he was talking, the poor lady was only half-listening to him. Her eyes were constantly straying to the open window and the lawn outside. Framton felt very sorry that he had come to visit her on a day that was filled with painful memories for her. If he had known, he would not have come.

“All the doctors who examined me ordered complete rest, no excitement and no physical strain,” he said in an attempt to introduce what he thought was a more interesting subject. Like many sick people, Framton expected everyone to be interested in all the details of his illnesses, and he quite enjoyed talking about them. “As for my diet,” he went on, “all the doctors have different opinions about what is the best for me.” “Do they ?” said Mrs. Sappleton politely. Then suddenly her face brightened, but not at what Framton was saying.



“Here they are at last!” she cried. “Just in time for tea, and all covered in mud!”

Framton trembled and looked across at the niece with eyes that were filled with pity for the poor lady who was – as he thought – seeing things that were not there. The girl was looking out through the open window and there was an expression of horror on her face. Framton turned round and looked in the same direction.

In the growing darkness, three figures were walking over the lawn towards the window. They all carried guns under their arms, and one of them had a white raincoat over his right shoulder. A tired brown dog followed at their heels. Nearer they came, walking in silence. Then suddenly a young voice burst into a song.

Framton rushed out of the room. He seized his hat and his stick on his way through the hall. Then out of the house he went, running as if he were escaping from a house on fire. He rushed through the gate at such speed that he nearly knocked a passing cyclist off his bicycle. “Here we are, my dear,” said the man with the white coat as he came in through the window, “rather muddy, I’m afraid, but most of it is dry. Who was that man who ran out as we came up ?”

“A most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel,” said Mrs. Sappleton. “He could talk of nothing but his illnesses, and he ran off without a word of goodbye or apology when he saw you coming. Anybody would think that he had seen a ghost.”

“I expect it was the dog,” her niece said to her calmly. “Before you came down he was telling me that he had a terrible fear of dogs. When he was in India, a pack of wild dogs chased him into a graveyard and he had to spend the night in a newly-dug grave with those fierce beasts howling right above his head. That was enough to frighten anybody for a lifetime, I should think.”

She was very clever at making up stories on the spur of the moment.

— *Saki (H.H. Munro)*

Glossary

doubtful	– causing doubt
gravely	– seriously
astonishment	– great surprise
moors	– tract of open uncultivated land preserved for shooting.
apology	– expression of regret for a fault
annoy	– to make one angry
tragedy	– tragic event
boggy	– wet like a swamp
excitement	– state of feeling, very pleased or interested

direction	– the point one moves
extraordinary	– very unusual
howling	– long loud crying of a dog or wolf
on the spur	– to do something suddenly without thinking
graveyard	– burial ground

Comprehension

1. Answer the following questions in one or two sentences :

- (i) Why did the doctors advise Framton Nuttel a complete rest ?
- (ii) What made Framton visit Mrs. Sappleton ?
- (iii) What was Mrs. Sappleton's great sorrow ?
- (iv) Why did Framton think that Mrs. Sappleton was mad ?
- (v) Why did Framton rush out of the room ?
- (vi) Describe the significance of the open window in the story.
- (vii) Bring out the element of suspense in the story.

2. **EXERCISE IN LANGUAGE**

Look at the sentences

1. The book is on the table.
2. They are in the room.
3. They went towards the temple.

The underlined words, show a relationship between the Noun and the Pronoun in each sentence. They are called **Prepositions**.

Now, complete the following sentences using appropriate prepositions.

- (i) He came time.
- (ii) The train is running time
- (iii) She came foot.
- (iv) He is going..... school.
- (v) I know him name
- (vi) We live rice.
- (vii) He rose high post.
- (viii) The boat sailed.....the stream.
- (ix) He is the army.
- (x) Bina is interested..... music.