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Dubliners

JAMES JOYCE

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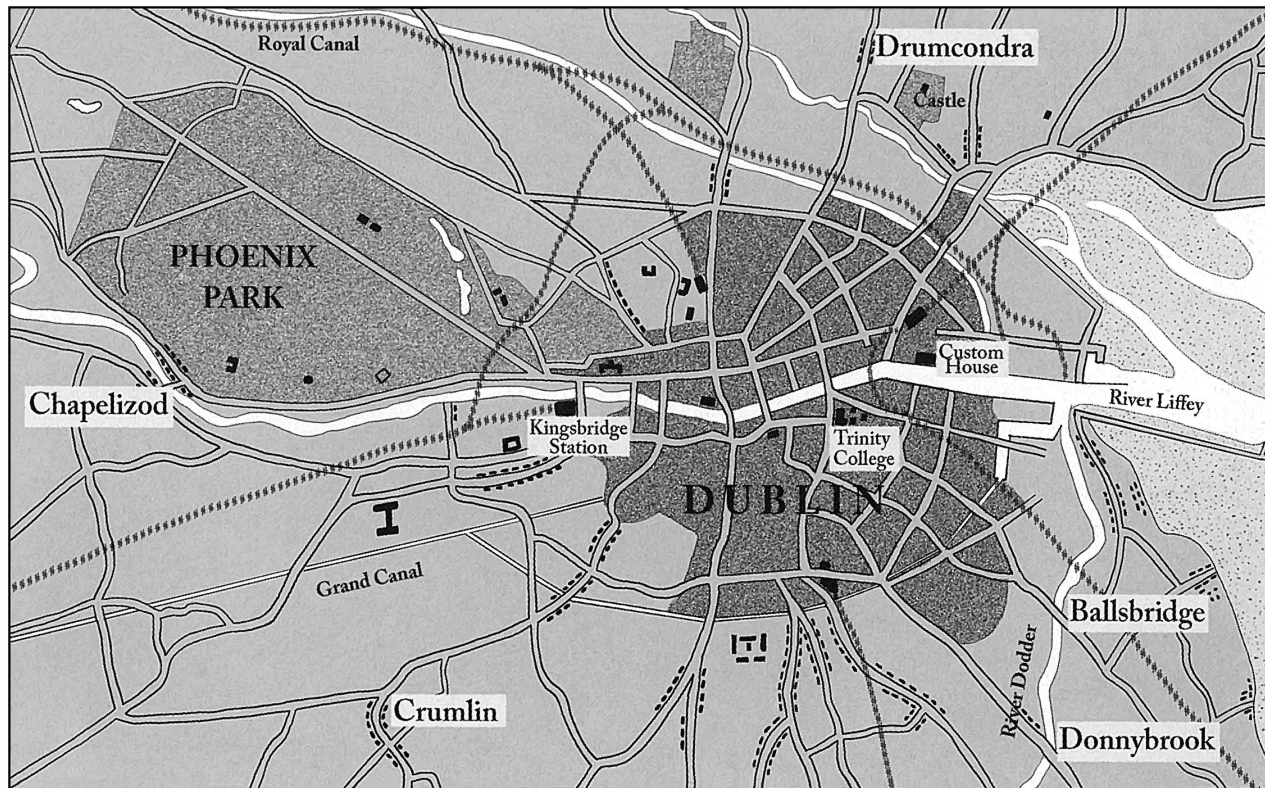
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CONTENTS

The Sisters	1
Araby	9
Eveline	15
Two Gallants	21
The Boarding House	30
A Little Cloud	38
Clay	50
A Painful Case	57
A Mother	67
The Dead	78
GLOSSARY	106
IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS	109
STORY NOTES	110
ABOUT DUBLIN	111
ABOUT JAMES JOYCE	113
ACTIVITIES: Before Reading	114
ACTIVITIES: While Reading	115
ACTIVITIES: After Reading	119
ABOUT THE BOOKWORMS LIBRARY	124

Map of Dublin



The Sisters

An elderly priest is dying in his home, where he is cared for by his two sisters. They are sad to lose him, but not everyone is sure about the old man. Even the young boy who was his friend has mixed feelings about his death.



There was no hope for him this time: it was the third stroke. Night after night I had passed the house and studied the lighted square of window; and night after night I had found it lighted in the same way, faintly and evenly. If he was dead, I thought, I would see the reflection of candles behind the drawn curtain, because I knew that two candles were always set at the head of a dead body. He had often said to me: *I am not long for this world*, and I had not believed him. Now I knew his words were true. Every night, as I stared up at the window, I said softly to myself the word *paralysis*. It had always sounded strange in my ears, but now it was like the name of some evil and sinful being. It filled me with fear, and yet I wanted to be nearer to it and to look at its deadly work.

Old Cotter was sitting at the fire, smoking, when I came downstairs to supper. While my aunt was spooning out my stirabout, he said, as if returning to some former remark of his, 'No, I wouldn't say he was exactly... but there was something strange about him. I'll tell you my opinion...'

He began to smoke his pipe, no doubt arranging his opinion in his mind. Annoying old fool! When we knew him first he used to be rather interesting, but I soon grew tired of him and his endless stories.

‘I have my own ideas about it,’ he said. ‘I think it was one of those... peculiar cases.’

He began to smoke again, without telling us his ideas. My uncle saw me staring and said to me, ‘Well, so your old friend is gone, you’ll be sorry to hear.’

‘Who?’ said I.

‘Father Flynn.’

‘Is he dead?’

‘Mr Cotter has just told us. He was passing by the house.’

I knew that I was under observation, so I continued eating as if the news had not interested me. My uncle explained to old Cotter, ‘The boy and Father Flynn were great friends. The old fellow taught him a great deal, mind you, and they say he had a great fondness for him.’

‘God have mercy on his soul,’ said my aunt, crossing herself.

Old Cotter looked at me for a while. I felt that his little round black eyes were examining me, but I would not satisfy him by looking up from my plate. He returned to his pipe and finally spat rudely into the fireplace.

‘I wouldn’t like children of mine,’ he said, ‘to talk too much to a man like that.’

‘How do you mean, Mr Cotter?’ asked my aunt.

‘What I mean is,’ said old Cotter, ‘it’s bad for children. My idea is, let a young boy run about and play with boys of his own age. Am I right, Jack?’

‘That’s what I’m always saying to him,’ said my uncle. ‘When I was a boy, every morning of my life I had a cold bath, winter and summer. And that’s why I’m the man I am now. Education is all very fine... Mr Cotter might have a slice of that cold meat,’ he added to my aunt.

‘No, no, not for me,’ said old Cotter.

My aunt brought out the dish of meat and laid it on the table. 'But why do you think it's not good for children, Mr Cotter?' she asked.

'It's bad for children,' said old Cotter, 'because their minds are so impressionable. When children see things like that, you know, it has an effect...'

I filled my mouth with stirabout, because I was frightened I might express my anger. Stupid old red-nosed fool!

It was late when I fell asleep. Though I was angry with old Cotter for referring to me as a child, the meaning of his unfinished sentences puzzled me. In the dark of my room I imagined that I saw again the heavy grey face of the paralysed man. I pulled the blankets over my head and tried to think of Christmas. But the grey face still followed me. It murmured, and I understood that it desired to confess something. I felt my soul moving away into some pleasant and sinful region, and there again I found Father Flynn's grey face waiting for me. It began to confess to me in a murmuring voice, and I wondered why it smiled continually. But then I remembered that it had died of paralysis, and I felt that I, too, was smiling weakly, as if I were the priest, listening to his confession and releasing him from his sin.

The next morning after breakfast, I went down to look at the modest little house in Great Britain Street. Today it was closed, and a black bow was tied to the doorknocker, with a card. I approached and read:

July 1st 1895

The Reverend James Flynn

(formerly of Saint Catherine's Church, Meath Street)

aged sixty-five years.

Rest In Peace

The reading of the card persuaded me that he was dead, and I was disturbed to find myself unsure what to do. If he had not been dead, I would have gone into the little dark room at the back of the house to find him sitting in his armchair by the fire, wrapped up so tightly in his overcoat that he could hardly breathe. Perhaps my aunt would have given me a packet of snuff for him, and this present would have woken him from his bored, sleepy state. It was always I who emptied the packet into his black snuffbox, because his hands shook too much. Even as he raised his large, trembling hand to his nose, little clouds of snuff came through his fingers over the front of his coat. It may have been these constant showers of snuff which gave his ancient priestly clothes their green faded look. The red handkerchief with which he tried to brush away the fallen snuff was no use at all, blackened as it always was with the snuff stains of a week.

I wished to go in and look at him, but I had not the courage to knock. I walked away slowly along the sunny side of the street, reading the theatrical advertisements in the shop windows as I went. I found it strange that neither I nor the day seemed in a sorrowful mood, and I felt annoyed at discovering in myself a feeling of freedom. It was as if I had been freed from something by Father Flynn's death. I wondered at this, because, as my uncle had said the night before, he had taught me a great deal.

He had studied in the Irish college in Rome and had taught me to speak Latin properly. He had told me stories about the early Christians and about Napoleon Bonaparte, and he had explained to me the meaning of the different ceremonies of the mass. Sometimes he had amused himself by putting difficult questions to me, asking me what one should do in certain circumstances. His questions showed me how complicated and mysterious were certain things about the church which I had

always considered simple. The duties of the priest seemed so weighty to me that I wondered how anybody had ever found in himself the courage to carry them out. I was not surprised when he told me that priests had written enormous books in order to provide answers to all these difficult questions. Often, when I thought of this, I could make no answer, or only a very foolish and hesitant one; he used to smile and nod his head two or three times. Sometimes he had made me learn prayers by heart, and as I repeated them, he used to smile thoughtfully and nod his head, now and then pushing large quantities of snuff up his nose, first on the left side, then the right. When he smiled, he used to uncover his big, discoloured teeth and let his tongue lie on his lower lip – a habit which had made me feel uneasy at the beginning of our friendship, before I knew him well.

As I walked along in the sun, I remembered old Cotter's words and tried to remember what had happened afterwards in the dream. I remembered that I had noticed long curtains and a swinging, old-fashioned lamp. I felt that I had been very far away, in some land where the customs were strange – in Persia, I thought. But I could not remember the end of the dream.

In the evening, my aunt took me with her to visit the house where Father Flynn lay. It was after sunset, but the windows of the houses that looked to the west reflected the deep gold of a great bank of clouds. Nannie received us in the hall and my aunt shook hands with her. The old woman pointed upwards with a questioning look, and when my aunt nodded, started climbing slowly up the narrow stairs in front of us. On the first floor, she stopped and signalled us forward encouragingly, towards the open door of the bedroom. My aunt went in and the old woman, seeing that I hesitated to enter, began to signal to me again repeatedly with her hand.

I went in on tiptoe. The room, with curtains drawn, was full of dark golden light, in which the candles looked like pale, thin flames. He was in a coffin. We all knelt down at the foot of the bed. I pretended to pray, but I could not gather my thoughts because of the sound of Nannie repeating her prayers. I noticed how clumsily her skirt was attached at the back and how worn her boots were on one side. The idea came to me that the old priest was smiling as he lay there in his coffin.

But no. When we got up and went to the head of the bed, I saw that he was not smiling. There he lay, grey-faced and serious, dressed for the mass, his large hands loosely holding a chalice. There was a heavy smell in the room – the flowers.

We crossed ourselves and came away. In the little room downstairs we found Eliza seated in Father Flynn's armchair. I felt my way towards my usual chair in the corner, while Nannie brought out a bottle of sherry and some wine glasses. She urged me to take some biscuits, but I refused because I thought I would make too much noise eating them. She went over quietly to the sofa, where she sat down behind her sister. No one spoke; we all stared at the empty fireplace.

My aunt waited until Eliza sighed, and then said, 'Ah, well, he's gone to a better world.'

Eliza sighed again and bowed her head in agreement.

'Did he... peacefully?' asked my aunt after a while.

'Oh, quite peacefully,' said Eliza. 'You couldn't tell when the breath went out of him. He had a beautiful death, God be praised.'

'And everything...?'

'Father O'Rourke was with him on Tuesday and said the final prayers with him and everything.'

'He knew then?'

‘He was quite ready, quite calm.’

‘He looks quite calm,’ said my aunt.

‘That’s what the woman we had in to wash him said. She said he just looked as if he was asleep, he looked so peaceful and calm.’

My aunt drank a little sherry from her glass and said, ‘Well anyway, Miss Flynn, it must be a great comfort for you to know that you did all you could for him. You were both very kind to him, I must say.’

‘Ah, poor James!’ said Eliza. ‘God knows we did all we could, as poor as we are. We wouldn’t see him go without anything, while he was living.’

Nannie had leaned her head against the sofa pillow and seemed about to fall asleep.

‘There’s poor Nannie,’ said Eliza looking at her, ‘she’s worn out. All the work we had, she and me, getting in the woman to wash him and then dressing him and then the coffin and then arranging about the funeral mass! If it hadn’t been for Father O’Rourke, I don’t know what we’d have done at all. It was him who brought us all the flowers and wrote out the notice for the newspaper and organized all poor James’s papers.’

‘Wasn’t that good of him?’ said my aunt.

Eliza closed her eyes and shook her head slowly. ‘Ah, there’s no friends like the old friends,’ she said, ‘when all is said and done, no friends that anybody can trust.’

‘Indeed, that’s true,’ said my aunt. ‘And I’m sure now that he’s gone to his everlasting reward he won’t forget you and all your kindness to him.’

‘Ah, poor James!’ Eliza stopped and then said thoughtfully, ‘Mind you, I noticed there was something strange about him lately. Whenever I’d bring his soup in, I’d find him with his

prayer book fallen on the floor, lying back in the chair with his mouth open. But still, he kept on saying that before the summer was over, he'd go out for a drive one fine day, just to see the old house where we were all born, and take me and Nannie with him. He had his mind set on that... Poor James!

'God have mercy on his soul!' said my aunt.

Eliza wiped her eyes with her handkerchief. 'The duties of the priesthood, they were too much for him,' she said. 'And then his life didn't go quite the way he wanted.'

'Yes,' said my aunt, 'he was a disappointed man. You could see that.'

A silence took possession of the little room. We waited respectfully for Eliza to break the silence, and after a long pause she said slowly, 'It was that chalice he broke, during mass. That was the beginning of it. Of course it wasn't his fault. But poor James was so nervous, God be merciful to him!'

'And was it that?' said my aunt. 'I heard something...'

Eliza nodded. 'It affected his mind. After that he was always wandering about by himself, talking to no one. So one night he was wanted to visit someone who was dying, and they couldn't find him anywhere. So they looked in the church. And what do you think? There he was, sitting up by himself in the dark in his confession box, wide awake and laughing softly to himself!'

She stopped suddenly as if to listen. I, too, listened, but there was no sound in the house, and I knew that the old priest was lying still in his coffin as we had seen him, unsmiling and grey-faced in death, an empty chalice on his chest.

Eliza went on, 'Wide awake and laughing to himself. So then, of course, when they saw that, that made them think that there was something wrong with him...'

Araby

For a few days the bazaar has come to the city. It is an exciting place for a boy, with its air of Eastern magic and its stalls selling unfamiliar things. It is even more exciting if love is his reason for going there.



North Richmond Street was a quiet street except at the hour when the school on the corner let the boys out. An uninhabited house of two floors stood at the end of the street, and the other houses stared at one another with brown, unemotional faces.

The person who rented our house before us, a priest, had died in the back living-room. Damp air hung in all the rooms, and the waste room behind the kitchen was full of old, useless papers. The wild garden behind the house contained a central apple tree and a few thin bushes, under one of which I found part of the priest's rusty bicycle. He had been a very generous priest; when he died, he left all his money to the poor and his furniture to his sister.

When the short days of winter came, darkness fell before we had eaten our dinners. When we met in the street, the houses had grown dark. The space of sky above us was the colour of ever-changing violet, and the lamps of the street lifted their weak lights towards it. The cold air bit into us and we played until our bodies were warm and our faces were pink. Our shouts echoed in the silent street. Our playing brought us through the dark muddy paths behind the houses, where we risked being attacked by the rough boys who lived there, to the back doors of the dark wet gardens.

When we returned to the street, light shone out from the

kitchen windows. If my uncle was seen turning the corner, we hid in the shadow until he had gone safely into his house. Or if Mangan's sister came out on the doorstep to call her brother in to his tea, we stayed in our shadow and watched her look up and down the street. We waited to see whether she would remain or go in, and if she remained, we had to leave our shadow and walk up to Mangan's steps. She was waiting for us, her figure sharply outlined by the light from the half-opened door. I stood by the railings, looking at her. Her dress swung as she moved her body, and the soft rope of her hair moved from side to side.

Every morning, I lay on the floor in our front room, watching her door. The curtain was drawn so that I could just see her, but I could not be seen. When she came out on the doorstep, my heart jumped. I ran to the hall, grabbed my books, and followed her. I kept her brown figure always in my eye, and when we came near the point at which our ways parted, I quickened my steps and passed her. This happened morning after morning. I had never spoken to her except for a few casual words, and yet her name made my foolish blood race.

She was in my mind even in the most unromantic places. Her name came to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises, which I myself did not understand. My eyes were often full of tears; I could not tell why. I thought little of the future. I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not. Nor did I know, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of my confused love for her. But my body was like a harp, and her words and movements were like fingers running over the strings.

At last, she spoke to me. When she said the first words to me, I was so confused that I did not know what to answer. She asked me if I was going to Araby. I forget whether I answered

yes or no. It would be a wonderful bazaar, she said; she would love to go.

‘And why can’t you?’ I asked.

While she spoke, she turned a silver bracelet round and round her wrist. She could not go, she said, because she had to stay in her convent. She held on to the railings, bowing her head towards me. The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up the hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand on the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood there.

‘It’s all right for you,’ she said.

‘If I go,’ I said, ‘I will bring you something.’

What foolishness destroyed my waking and sleeping thoughts after that evening! I wished to bring to an end the boring days that remained until Saturday. At night in my bedroom and by day in the classroom, her face came between me and the page I was trying to read. I heard the word *Araby* calling to me through the silence which my soul desired; it surrounded me with Eastern magic. I asked for permission to go to the bazaar on Saturday night. My aunt was surprised.

On Saturday morning, I reminded my uncle that I wished to go to the bazaar in the evening. He answered me sharply, ‘Yes, boy, I know.’ As he was in the hall, I could not go into the front room and look out of the window for her. I left the house in a bad mood and walked slowly towards the school. The air was pitilessly cold and already I feared what might happen.

When I came home to dinner, my uncle had not yet got back home. I sat staring at the clock for some time. When its noise began to annoy me, I went upstairs. From the front window, I saw the other boys playing below in the street. Their cries

reached me faintly and, leaning my forehead against the cool glass, I looked over at the dark house where she lived. I stood there for an hour, seeing nothing but the brown figure in my imagination, with the lamplight on the curve of her neck, her hand on the railings, and the petticoat below her dress.

When I came downstairs again, I found Mrs Mercer, a neighbour, having tea with my aunt. I had to put up with the gossip of the tea-table for more than an hour, and still my uncle did not come. When Mrs Mercer had gone, I began to walk up and down angrily. My aunt said, 'I'm afraid you may have to put off your bazaar for tonight.'

At nine o'clock, I heard my uncle's key in the hall door. I heard him talking to himself and heard the coat-stand rocking when it received the weight of his coat. When he was halfway through his dinner I asked him to give me the money to go to the bazaar. He had forgotten.

'The people are in bed now,' he said.

My aunt said to him, 'Can't you give him the money and let him go? You've kept him late enough as it is.'

My uncle said he was very sorry he had forgotten. He said he believed in the old saying: *All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy*. He asked me where I was going and, when I had told him a second time, he asked if I knew the song about Araby. When I left the kitchen, he was about to tell my aunt the first lines of the song. He gave me two shillings, which I held tightly in my hand as I left the house.

I walked down Buckingham Street to the station and took the deserted train. After an unbearable delay, it moved slowly out of the station, and crept along. When I finally got out, I saw by the station clock that it was ten minutes to ten. In front of me was a large building which displayed the magical name, Araby.

I went in quickly, giving a shilling to a tired-looking man, and found myself in a big hall. Most of the stalls were closed, and I recognized a silence like that which fills a church after a service. I walked shyly into the centre of the bazaar. Only a few people were gathered around the stalls that were still open. Remembering with difficulty why I had come, I went over to one of them and examined vases and flowered teapots.



Only a few people were gathered around the stalls that were still open.

At the door of the stall a young lady was talking and laughing with two young gentlemen. I listened to them.

‘O, I never said such a thing!’

‘O, but you did!’

‘O, but I didn’t!’

‘Didn’t she say that?’

‘She did. I heard her.’

‘O, there’s a naughty little lie!’

Observing me, the young lady came over and asked me if I wished to buy anything. Her voice was not encouraging; she seemed to have spoken to me out of a sense of duty. I looked nervously at the great vases that stood like Eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to her stall, and murmured, ‘No, thank you.’

The young lady changed the position of one of the vases and went back to the two young men. They continued their conversation as before. Once or twice the young lady glanced at me over her shoulder.

I knew my stay was useless, but I went on looking at her stall, to make my interest in what she was selling seem more real. Then I turned slowly away and walked down the middle of the bazaar. I allowed the coins to fall against each other in my pocket. I heard a voice call from the upper part of the hall that the light was out; it was now completely dark up there.

Staring up into the darkness, I saw myself as a creature driven and laughed at by vanity, and my eyes burned with pain and anger.

Eveline

Eveline is facing the most important decision of her life. Should she stay at home, a place of misery but familiarity? Or should she take a risk, and seize the opportunity to escape? The decision she makes will determine her whole future.



She sat at the window watching the evening darken the street. Her head was against the curtains, and she could smell the dust in their heavy cotton. She was tired.

Few people passed. The man from the last house passed on his way home; she heard his footsteps on the pavement and afterwards on the path in front of the new red houses. One time there used to be a field in which she and her brothers and sisters used to play every evening with other people's children. Then a man from Belfast bought the field and built houses in it – not like their little brown houses, but bright brick houses with shining roofs. The children from the street used to play together in that field – the Devines, the Waters, the Dunns, she and her brothers and sisters.

She thought her family had seemed happy then. Her father was not so bad then, and besides, her mother was alive. That was a long time ago; she and her brothers and sisters were all grown up now, and her mother was dead. Her friend Tizzie Dunn was dead, too, and the Waters family had gone back to England. Everything changes. Now she was going to go away like the others, to leave her home.

Home! She looked round the room at all its familiar objects which she had dusted once a week for so many years, wondering where all the dust could possibly come from.

Perhaps she would never see again all those things which she had never dreamed of being separated from.

She had agreed to go away, to leave her home. Was that wise? She tried to weigh each side of the question. In her home she had shelter and food; she had people she had known all her life around her. Of course, she had to work hard both in the house and at business. What would they say of her in the shop where she worked, when they found out that she had run away with a fellow? They would say she was a fool, perhaps, and they would advertise to fill her place. Miss Gavan, the manager, would be glad. She had always had a sharp tongue, especially whenever there were people listening.

‘Miss Hill, don’t you see that these ladies are waiting?’

‘Hurry up, Miss Hill, please.’

Eveline would not cry many tears at leaving the shop.

But in her new home, in a distant, unknown country, it would not be like that. Then she would be married – she, Eveline. People would treat her with respect then. She would not be treated as her mother had been. Even now, although she was over nineteen, she sometimes felt herself in danger of her father’s violence. She knew it was his violence that had weakened her heart. When they were growing up, he had never hit her, like he used to hit her brothers Harry and Ernest, because she was a girl. But recently he had begun to threaten her and say what he would do to her. And now she had nobody to protect her. Ernest was dead, and Harry was nearly always working away from home.

Anyway, she was tired of arguing about money every Saturday night. She always gave all her wages, and Harry always sent what he could, but the difficulty was to get any money from her father. He said she was no good with money, and that he