

The Open Window

SAKI

About the Author

Saki is the pen name of HECTOR HUGH MUNRO (1870–1916), a well-known English writer known more for his short stories. Born in Burma, the son of a police officer, he was brought up by two maiden aunts in England. After his education, Munro travelled all over Europe and eventually followed his father into the Burma police. Two years later, failing health forced him to resign and return to England, where he started his career as a journalist, writing for newspapers such as the *Westminster Gazette*, *Daily Express*, *Bystander*, *Morning Post*, and *Outlook*. He died on the battlefield in France as a soldier in the First World War.

A superb story teller of the lives and manners of people in this period, Saki is often compared to O. Henry and Dorothy Parker. Known today for his short stories, he began his career with a book of history called *The Rise of the Russian Empire*, published in 1900. His first collection of short stories called *Not-so-Stories* came out in 1902. Beside his short stories (which were first published in newspapers and later anthologised into several volumes), he wrote a full-length play, *The Watched Pot*, in collaboration with another writer, and a short novel, *The Unbearable Bassington*.

About the Story

'The Open Window' tells the story of a man with an unlikely name 'Framton Nuttel' and his visit to the country. Mr Nuttel is portrayed as having had a history of bad nerves and calls upon his sister's friends in the country to deliver her letters to them. The story is an account of one such visit when Mr Nuttel comes across an interesting tale narrated to him by a fifteen year old who has a talent for storytelling. The story was initially anthologised in *Beasts and Superbeasts* in 1914. The character of the prankster and the plot of the witty practical joke recur in Saki's work. 'The Open Window' showcases the theme of telling tall tales, with the author's characteristic wit, irony, and tongue-in-cheek humour.

The Open Window

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

Framton Nuttel tried to say a few words which should flatter both the niece of the moment and the aunt that was to come. Privately he doubted whether these formal visits on total strangers would help the nerve cure which he was to undergo.

'I know how it will be,' his sister had said when he was preparing to leave for the country. 'You will bury yourself down there and not speak to anybody. I shall just give you letters to all the people I know there. Some of them, as far as I can remember, were quite nice.'

Framton wondered whether Mrs Sappleton, the lady to whom he was presenting one of the letters, was one of the nice people.

'Do you know many of the people around here?' asked the niece, when she thought that they had been silent long enough.

'Hardly anybody,' said Framton. 'My sister was staying here, at the rectory, you know, about four years ago, and she gave me letters of introduction to some of the people here.'

'Then you know practically nothing about my aunt?' continued the young lady.

'Only her name and address,' admitted the visitor. He was wondering whether Mrs Sappleton was in the married or widowed state. Something about the room made him believe the former.

'Her great tragedy happened just three years ago,' said the child. 'That would be since the time your sister was here.'

'Her tragedy?' asked Framton. Somehow in this restful country spot tragedies seemed out of place.

'You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on a cold October afternoon,' said the niece, pointing to a large French window that opened on to a lawn.

'It is quite warm for the time of the year,' said Framton. 'But has that window got anything to do with her tragedy?'

'Out through that window, three years ago, her husband and her two young brothers went off for their day's shooting. They never came back. In crossing the moor they were engulfed in a treacherous part of the marsh. Their bodies were never recovered. That was the dreadful part of it.'

Here the child's voice lost its self-possessed note. 'Poor Aunt always thinks that they will come back some day, they and the little brown spaniel that was lost with them, and walk in through that window just as they used to do. That is why the window is kept open every evening until dusk. Poor dear aunt, she has often told me how they went out, her husband with his white raincoat over his arm. Do you know, sometimes on quiet evenings like this, I almost get a creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window—'

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

'I hope Vera has been amusing you?' she said.

'She has been very interesting,' said Framton. 'I hope you don't mind the open window,' said Mrs Sappleton.

'My husband and brothers will be home from shooting, and they always come in this way.'

She rattled on cheerfully about the shooting and the scarcity of birds, and the prospects for duck in the winter. To Framton it was all purely horrible. He made a desperate effort to turn the talk to a less horrible subject; but he was conscious that his hostess was giving him only a fragment of her attention, and her eyes were constantly wandering past him to the open window.

'The doctors have ordered me complete rest from mental excitement and violent physical exercise,' announced Framton,

who, like many people, mistakenly believed that total strangers are hungry for details of one's illness, their cause and cure. 'Oh?' said Mrs Sappleton, in a voice which only replaced a yawn at the last moment. Then she suddenly brightened into alert attention—but not to what Framton was saying.

'Here they are at last!' she cried. 'Just in time for tea.' Framton shivered slightly and turned towards the niece with a look of sympathetic understanding. The child was staring out through the open window with dazed horror in her eyes. Framton swung round in his seat and looked in the same direction.

In the deepening twilight three figures were walking noiselessly across the lawn towards the window. They all carried guns under their arms, and one of them had a white coat over his shoulders. A tired brown spaniel kept close at their heels. Framton grabbed wildly at his stick and hat; the hall-door and the gravel drive were dimly noted stages in his hasty retreat. A cyclist coming along the road had to run into the hedge to avoid colliding with him.

'Here we are, my dear,' said the bearer of the white raincoat, coming in through the window. 'Who was that who rushed out as we came up?'

'A most extraordinary man, a Mr Nuttel,' said Mrs Sappleton. 'Could only talk about his illnesses, and dashed off without a word of good-bye or apology when you arrived. One would think he had seen a ghost.'

'I think it was the spaniel,' said the niece calmly. 'He told me he had a horror of dogs. He was once hunted into a cemetery somewhere on the banks of the Ganges by a pack of wild dogs, and had to spend the night in a newly dug grave with the creatures snarling and grinning and foaming just above him. Enough to make anyone lose his nerve.'

Romance at short notice was her speciality.

(Slightly abridged from the original.)

Glossary

self-possessed:	calm; confident
formal:	according to accepted rules or customs
nerve cure:	treatment for nervous disorder
bury oneself:	keep away from people
rectory:	house of the rector (parish priest)

The World is Too Much With Us

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

About the Author

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770–1850), born in the Lake District, was the son of an attorney. He was educated first at Penrith and then at Hawkshead Grammar school. He joined St. John's College, Cambridge in 1787. Wordsworth describes the different periods of his life vividly in his work, 'The Prelude'.

In 1795, after receiving a legacy, Wordsworth lived with his sister Dorothy, first in Dorset and then at Alfoxden, close to his friend and fellow poet, Coleridge. During this period Wordsworth wrote many of his greatest poems. In the winter of 1798–99 he visited Germany with his sister Dorothy and Coleridge. Wordsworth and Coleridge published a collection of poems called the *Lyrical Ballads* and in 1800 came out with the second edition of the same. The poems of the collection were markedly different from those of Wordsworth's predecessors and belonged to the genre of Romantic poetry. Idealism, escapism, a return to God and to nature were some of the themes that characterised this kind of poetry. This publication was followed, by the publication of *Poems in Two Volumes*, in 1807, which included the poems, 'Resolution and Independence' and 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'.