

LBRIS

We know  
books

# Sweet and Sour

V. Alcock, M. Allingham,  
I. Asimov, B. Capes, R. Dahl,  
W. W. Jacobs, A. Lurie,  
K. Mansfield, R. Rendell,  
S. Rushdie, Saki

A collection of stories  
for pleasure and learning  
by Antonella Mignani

<b>Introduction</b>	VII
<b>The short story: definition and characteristics</b>	VII
<b>The reading process and the competent reader</b>	X

## The Horror Story

 <b>The Marble Hands</b> by Bernard Capes	1
Now it's your turn!	
<b>The Monkey's Paw</b> by W. W. Jacobs	11
The Horror Story: Definition and Origins	31

## The Ghost Story

<b>The Rivals</b> by Vivien Alcock	33
Now it's your turn!	
<b>The Highboy</b> by Alison Lurie	49
The Ghost Story: Definition and Origins	72

## The Crime Story

<b>A Glowing Future</b> by Ruth Rendell	75
Now it's your turn!	
<b>Three is a Lucky Number</b> by Margery Allingham	91
The Crime Story: Definition and Origins	109

## The Humorous Story

 <b>Shock Tactics</b> by Saki	113
Now it's your turn!	
<b>Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's Coat</b> by Roald Dahl	127
The Humorous Story: Definition and Origins	152

## The Psychological Story

 <b>The Canary</b> by Katherine Mansfield	155
Now it's your turn!	
 <b>Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies</b> by Salman Rushdie	167
The Psychological Story: Definition and Origins	180

## The Science Fiction Story

Self-Assessment	
<b>A Boy's Best Friend</b> by Isaac Asimov	185
The Science Fiction Story: Definition and Origins	193

<b>A General Overview</b>	197
---------------------------	-----

**While listening, pay attention to:**

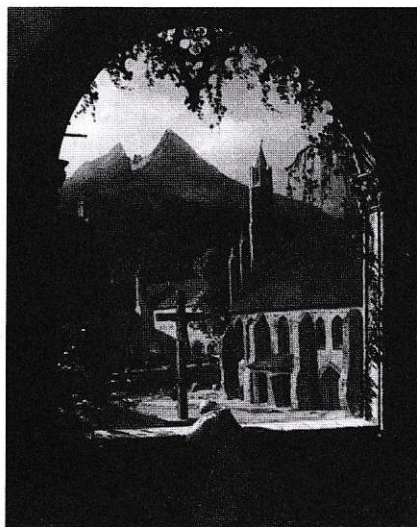
- 1 where the characters are and what they are doing;
- 2 what one character asks the other to do;
- 3 what unusual experience this character goes through;
- 4 how the other reacts to it.

**W**

e left our bicycles by the little lych-gate <sup>1</sup> and entered the old churchyard. Heriot

5 had told me frankly that he did not want to come; but at the last moment, sentiment or curiosity prevailing with him, he had changed his mind. I knew indefinitely that there was something disagreeable to him in the place's associations, though he had always referred with affection to the relative with whom he had stayed here as a boy. Perhaps she lay under one of these greening stones.

15 We walked round the church, with its squat, shingled spire. <sup>2</sup> It was utterly <sup>3</sup> peaceful, here on the brow <sup>4</sup> of the little town where the flowering fields began. The bones of the hill were the bones of the dead, and its flesh was grass. Suddenly Heriot stopped me. We were standing then to the northwest of the chancel, <sup>5</sup> and a gloom of motionless trees overshadowed us.



Churchyard of a Monastery with a View of the Watzmann (1835) by A. W. Ahlborn. *Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten, Berlin.*

- 1 **lych-gate** : gateway to a churchyard covered by a roof, to protect coffins from the rain before a funeral.
- 2 **squat, shingled spire** : thick, short conical structure on top of the church tower, covered with rectangular wooden tiles.

- 3 **utterly** : absolutely.
- 4 **brow** [brau] : (here) the top of a hill.
- 5 **chancel** : part of a church where the priests and choir sit, which contains the altar.

'I wish you'd just look in there a moment,' he said, 'and come back and tell me what you see.'

He was pointing towards a little bay<sup>1</sup> made by the low boundary<sup>2</sup> wall, the green floor of which was hidden from our view by the thick branches and a couple of interposing tombs, huge, coffer-shaped,<sup>3</sup> and shut within rails. His voice sounded odd; there was a 'plunging'<sup>4</sup> look in his eyes, to use a gambler's<sup>5</sup> phrase. I stared at him a moment, followed the direction of his hand; then, without a word, stooped<sup>6</sup> under the heavy-brushing boughs, passed round the great tombs, and came upon a solitary grave.

It lay there quite alone in the hidden bay – a strange thing, fantastic and gruesome.<sup>7</sup> There was no headstone, but a bevelled<sup>8</sup> marble curb,<sup>9</sup> without name or epitaph, enclosed a gravelled<sup>10</sup> space from which projected two hands. They were of white marble, very faintly touched with green, and conveyed in that still, lonely spot a most curious sense of reality, as if actually thrust up,<sup>11</sup> deathly and alluring,<sup>12</sup> from the grave beneath. The impression grew upon me as I looked, until I could have thought they moved stealthily,<sup>13</sup> consciously, turning in the soil as if to greet me. It was absurd, but – I turned and went rather hastily back to Heriot.

'All right. I see they are there still,' he said; and that was all. Without another word we left the place and, remounting, continued our way.

## Check your understanding

- 1 What relation is there between the two characters?
- 2 What do you learn about them?
- 3 Which element of the story (people, place or events) has been described in detail so far? Can you guess why?
- 4 How do you think the story will develop?

1 **bay** : (here) small enclosed area.

2 **boundary** : marking the limits of the enclosed area.

3 **coffer-shaped** : in the shape of a box.

4 **plunging** : (here) acute and penetrating, as if looking through someone.

5 **gambler** : person who plays a game for money or property.

6 **stooped** : bent the body forward and downward while simultaneously bending the knees.

7 **gruesome** [gru:səm] : horrible and disgusting.

8 **bevelled** : with rounded corners.

9 **curb** [kɜ:'b] : enclosed frame.

10 **gravelled** : covered with very small stones.

11 **thrust up** : pushed up.

12 **alluring** : strangely fascinating.

13 **stealthily** : slowly and deliberately.

**While listening, pay attention to:**

- 1 what the place reminds Heriot of;
- 2 which aspects of the woman's personality are particularly highlighted;
- 3 Heriot's final impressions about the experience he has just narrated.

**M**

iles from the spot,  
lying on a sunny  
downside, with the  
sheep about us in

5 hundreds cropping the hot grass, he  
told me the story:

'She and her husband were  
living in the town at the time of my  
first visit there, when I was a child  
10 of seven. They were known to Aunt  
Caddie, who disliked the woman. I  
did not dislike her at all, because,  
when we met, she made a favourite  
of me. She was a little pretty thing,  
15 frivolous and shallow;<sup>1</sup> but truly, I  
know now, with an abominable side  
to her.

'She was inordinately vain<sup>2</sup> of  
her hands; and indeed they were  
20 the loveliest things, softer and shapelier<sup>3</sup> than a child's. She used to have  
them photographed, in fifty different positions; and once they were  
exquisitely done in marble by a sculptor, a friend of hers. Yes, those were the  
ones you saw. But they were cruel little hands, for all their beauty. There was  
something wicked<sup>4</sup> and unclean about the way in which she regarded them.

25 'She died while I was there, and she was commemorated by her own



*La Bella Mano (1875) by D. G. Rossetti.  
Delaware Art Museum.*

1 **shallow** : superficial.

2 **vain** : proud.

3 **shapelier** : better shaped and proportioned.

4 **wicked** : evil.

explicit desire after the fashion<sup>1</sup> you saw. The marble hands were to be her sole epitaph, more eloquent than letters. They should preserve her name and the tradition of her most exquisite feature to remoter ages than any crumbling inscription could reach. And so it was done.

'That fancy was not popular with the parishioners,<sup>2</sup> but it gave me no childish qualms.<sup>3</sup> The hands were really beautifully modelled on the originals, and the originals had often caressed me. I was never afraid to go and look at them, sprouting<sup>4</sup> like white celery<sup>5</sup> from the ground.

I left, and two years later was visiting Aunt Caddie a second time. In the course of conversation I learned that the husband of the woman had married again – a lady belonging to the place – and that the hands, only quite recently, had been removed. The new wife had objected to them – for some reason perhaps not difficult to understand – and they had been uprooted<sup>6</sup> by the husband's order.

I think I was a little sorry – the hands had always seemed somehow personal to me – and, on the first occasion that offered, I slipped away by myself to see how the grave looked without them. It was a close,<sup>7</sup> lowering day, I remember, and the churchyard was very still. Directly, stooping under the branches, I saw the spot. I understood that Aunt Caddie had spoken prematurely. The hands had not been removed so far, but were extended in their old place and attitude, looking as if held out to welcome me. I was glad; and I ran and knelt,<sup>8</sup> and put my own hands down to touch them. They were soft and cold like dead meat, and they closed caressingly about mine, as if inviting me to pull – to pull.

'I don't know what happened afterwards. Perhaps I had been sickening all the time for the fever which overtook me. There was a period of horror, and blankness – of crawling, worm-threaded immurements<sup>9</sup> and heaving<sup>10</sup> bones – and then at last the blessed daylight.'

Heriot stopped, and sat plucking at the crisp pasture.

1 **after the fashion** : (here) in the way.

2 **parishioners** : inhabitants of a parish, the area around a church for which the priest is responsible.

3 **qualms** [kwa:ms] : sudden disturbing emotions or feelings of uneasiness, doubt or fear.

4 **sprouting** : (here) coming out of the ground.

5 **celery** : vegetable of the carrot family with a white thick stem.

6 **uprooted** : (here) pulled out of the ground.

7 **close** : (here) uncomfortably humid.

8 **knelt** [nelt] : bent the knees and rested on them.

9 **worm-threaded immurements** : small dark prisons populated by crawling insects, like worms.

10 **heaving** : (here) moving.

55 'I never learned,' he said suddenly, 'what other experiences synchronised with mine. But the place somehow got an uncanny<sup>1</sup> reputation, and the marble hands were put back. Imagination, to be sure, can play strange tricks with one.'

### Check your understanding

- 1 Can you explain Heriot's and the villagers' different reactions to the woman's last wish?
- 2 Is the memory of the experience in the churchyard still vivid in Heriot's mind?
- 3 Does he try to give a rational explanation for his adventure? Does it sound convincing?

### Key word: horror

**Horror** is a strong, shocking feeling of fear that paralyses our rational faculties. It is usually triggered off by a very unusual experience, which may also have supernatural characteristics. The word horror derives from the Latin verb *horrere*, meaning 'to make the hair stand on end, to tremble and shudder'.

Horror may derive not only from the presence of supernatural agents such as werewolves, vampires and demons, but also from the exploration of what the human mind can endure, especially in conditions of extreme terror and physical pain, such as intense grief, torture and imprisonment.

Hell and its emissaries can bring horror into the world of the living, but extreme evil can spring from within the human mind as well, in the form of a destructive force that manifests itself in delirium, nightmares and hallucinations.



The Nightmare (1781) by H. Füssli.  
The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.

1 **uncanny** : mysterious, suggesting superhuman or supernatural powers.

- 1 Go through the text and underline all the words and expressions that convey horror and a sense of wonder.

**Key concept: focalisation**

The term **focalisation** defines the spatial and temporal relationship between *who* experiences the facts narrated (the **focaliser**) and *what* is experienced (the **focalised**). This relationship can remain stable and homogeneous throughout the text or shift according to what a character experiences and how this is experienced in the various sections of the text. In this case, we talk about **multiple focalisation**.

Focalisation can be *external* or *internal* to the story. The grid below sums up the various modes of narration.

<b>External focaliser (EF)</b>	An external voice functions both as narrator and focaliser of the events: the viewpoint from which everything is seen is not identifiable with any of the characters'. The narration is in the third person.
<b>Character focaliser – third person (CFE)</b>	The narrating voice is external to the story, but the focaliser is personified and internal, that is, events are seen from his/her viewpoint. The narration is in the third person, but the character focaliser (or <b>centre of consciousness</b> ) can be identified through the use of <i>verbs of experiencing</i> that work as language markers, such as <i>feel, think, wonder, smell, believe</i> etc.
<b>Character focaliser – first person (CFI)</b>	The narrator and the focaliser coincide in one character from the story. Narration is in the first person and focalisation is internal to the fictional world.

In some stories, there may be two *levels of narration* or even more. A character in the story (whose actions are the object of narration) may start narrating another story, which is called **inner narrative**. This device is defined as **narrative within narrative** and can lead to a virtually infinite number of narrative levels.

Sometimes a character starts telling a story about something that happened before the main one. The *temporal scheme* of the main story is therefore dislocated, as there is a jump backwards into a more distant past. This device is called **flashback** or **retrospective narration** and serves a variety of purposes, such as giving information about a character's personality, revealing hidden events, solving a mystery, etc.

- 2 What aspects of 'The Marble Hands' make it similar to other horror stories you have read? Is it a traditional horror story in your opinion? Give reasons for your answer.
- 3 Is it successful as a horror story or not? Give reasons.
- 4 As you have probably realised, this story develops on two narrative levels. Complete the table below to distinguish between them.

	Main narrative	Narrative within narrative
Setting		
Characters		
Events: kernels (main events) catalysts (minor events)	<i>Heriot's request</i>	
Closure	<i>closed, as the young man gets an explanation both for his strange feelings in front of the grave and for his friend's behaviour</i>	<i>open, because...</i>
Narrator		
Focalisation		<i>internal, because...</i>

### Learning to learn: summarising

Whenever you have to report on a story you have read, you usually begin with a summary of its contents. An effective summary has the following characteristics:

- it is compact, that is, it is a shortened version of the original text which only contains essential information. Its length is usually one third of the original text;
- it is cohesive and coherent, that is, the relations between each part of the narrative are rendered linguistically through the appropriate use of link words, verb tenses, prepositions of time and space, personal pronouns etc., so that the summary is clearly understandable even by those who have not read the original text. In other words, the events must be organised in chronological or strictly logical order;
- it may be either in the present tense or in the past tense.

- 5 Use the words in the box below to complete the gapped summary of 'The Marble Hands'.

went Heriot peculiar fascination tomb projected two  
greeting photographed used protagonist what churchyard  
friends imagination later back place visit woman villagers  
young vain hands marble see went removed happened  
unable considered pull afterwards experience memories  
epitaph know similar story uneasy

A <sup>1</sup>..... man tells what <sup>2</sup>..... to him in a country <sup>3</sup>..... where he has stopped with <sup>4</sup>....., a friend of his. Although the <sup>5</sup>..... was peaceful and pleasant, Heriot seemed <sup>6</sup>..... and asked his friend to have a look at a solitary <sup>7</sup>..... and then report what he saw. When he approached the isolated grave, two marble hands that <sup>8</sup>..... from the earth seemed to move in a sort of <sup>9</sup>..... This <sup>10</sup>..... was so shocking and unexpected that he was <sup>11</sup>..... to report it. However, Heriot seemed to guess <sup>12</sup>..... had happened, even if at first the two <sup>13</sup>..... did not talk about the tomb and <sup>14</sup>..... away.

A little while <sup>15</sup>....., Heriot told his friend an extraordinary <sup>16</sup>.....

Years before he had gone to the village to <sup>17</sup>..... his Aunt Caddie. Among his aunt's acquaintances, there was a married <sup>18</sup>..... who liked him very much from the first time they met. She was rather <sup>19</sup>....., though, and not very well thought of by the <sup>20</sup>....., as she was extremely <sup>21</sup>..... and had a sort of evil <sup>22</sup>..... for her own <sup>23</sup>....., which she had <sup>24</sup>..... and even reproduced in <sup>25</sup>..... She died when she was still young and wanted the marble hands to be her <sup>26</sup>..... Young Heriot <sup>27</sup>..... to go to the churchyard to <sup>28</sup>..... them.

Heriot went back to the village after <sup>29</sup>..... years. While talking to his aunt, he learned that the hands had been <sup>30</sup>..... from the consecrated ground, as they were probably <sup>31</sup>..... inappropriate for a graveyard. Heriot wanted to see how the grave looked without them, so he <sup>32</sup>..... to the churchyard. The marble hands were there, inviting him to join them and <sup>33</sup>.....

What happened <sup>34</sup>..... is still not clear to the <sup>35</sup>..... He only has confused <sup>36</sup>..... of darkness, imprisonment and horror. Suddenly it was light again and he was safe. Heriot did not <sup>37</sup>..... whether other people had had <sup>38</sup>..... experiences, but soon after the hands were put <sup>39</sup>..... on the woman's grave. Maybe it was all down to his <sup>40</sup>....., or maybe not...

- 6 Now try to make the summary even shorter. Use your own words.