

Cat in the Rain by Ernest Hemingway

Author Biography

HEMINGWAY, Ernest Miller (1899-1961), is an American short story writer and novelist, born in Illinois, the son of a doctor. After working as a Kansas City reporter he served in 1918 as a volunteer with an ambulance unit on the Italian front, where he was wounded, then worked as a reporter for the *Toronto Star* before settling in Paris among the American expatriate literary group, where he met Pound, Stein, Ford, and others described in his posthumously published *A Moveable Feast* (1964). His *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923) was followed by *In Our Time* (1923; stories) and two novels, the satirical *The Torrents of Spring* (1926) and the more characteristic *The Sun Also Rises* (1926; in England, as *Fiesta*, 1927), with which he made his name. It catches the post-war mood of disillusion of the so-called 'lost generation' through its portrayal of the wanderings of Lady Brett Ashley and her entourage, which includes the war-wounded, impotent American reporter Jake Barnes; its economy of style and characterization and its 'toughness' of attitude made a great impression. *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), the story of a love affair between an American lieutenant and an English nurse during the war on the Italian front, confirmed his position as one of the most influential writers of the time. He has been considered a finer writer of short stories than of novels, and his collections *Men without Women* (1927) and *Winner Take Nothing* (1933) are especially notable. His growing dissatisfaction with contemporary culture was shown by his deliberate cultivation of the brutal and the primitive; he celebrated bullfighting in *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) and big game hunting in *The Green Hills of Africa* (1935). He actively supported the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) is set against its background. He was a war correspondent in Europe in the Second World War. In his later years he lived mostly in Cuba, where his passion for deep-sea fishing provided the setting for his most successful later work, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), a parable-novella about man's struggle against nature. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1954 and wrote little thereafter; he shot himself in July 1961, having been seriously ill for some time. Various posthumous publications followed, including volumes of selected journalism and his *Selected Letters* (1981).

Cat in the Rain (Text)

There were only two Americans stopping at the hotel. They did not know any of the people they passed on the stairs on their way to and from their room. Their room was on the second floor facing the sea. It also faced the public garden and the war monument. There were big palms and green benches in the public garden.

In the good weather there was always an artist with his easel. Artists liked the way the palms grew and the bright colors of the hotels facing the gardens and the sea. Italians came from a long way off to look up at the war monument. It was made of bronze and glistened in the rain. It was raining. The rain dripped from the palm trees. Water stood in pools on the gravel paths. The sea broke in a long line in the rain and slipped back down the beach to come up and break again in a long line in the rain. The motor cars were gone from the square by the war monument. Across the square in the doorway of the café a waiter stood looking out at the empty square.

The American wife stood at the window looking out. Outside right under their window a cat was crouched under one of the dripping green tables. The cat was trying to make herself so compact that she would not be dripped on.

'I'm going down and get that kitty,' the American wife said.

'I'll do it,' her husband offered from the bed.

'No, I'll get it. The poor kitty out trying to keep dry under a table.'

The husband went on reading, lying propped up with the two pillows at the foot of the bed.

'Don't get wet,' he said.

The wife went downstairs and the hotel owner stood up and bowed to her as she passed the office. His desk

was at the far end of the office. He was an old man and very tall.

'Il piove,1'the wife said. She liked the hotel-keeper.

'Si, Si, Signora, brutto tempo2. It is very bad weather.'

He stood behind his desk in the far end of the dim room. The wife liked him. She liked the deadly serious way he received any complaints. She liked his dignity. She

liked the way he wanted to serve her. She liked the way he felt about being a hotel-keeper. She liked his old, heavy face and big hands. Liking him she opened the door and looked out. It was raining harder. A man in a rubber cape was crossing the empty square to the café. The cat would be around to the right. Perhaps she could go along under the eaves. As she stood in the doorway an umbrella opened behind her. It was the maid who looked after their room.

‘You must not get wet,’ she smiled, speaking Italian. Of course, the hotel-keeper had sent her. With the maid holding the umbrella over her, she walked along the gravel path until she was under their window. The table was there, washed bright green in the rain, but the cat was gone. She was suddenly disappointed. The maid looked up at her.

‘Ha perduto qualche cosa, Signora?’³

‘There was a cat,’ said the American girl.

‘A cat?’

‘Si, il gatto.’

‘A cat?’ the maid laughed. ‘A cat in the rain?’

‘Yes, —’ she said, ‘under the table.’ Then, ‘Oh, I wanted it so much. I wanted a kitty.’

When she talked English the maid’s face tightened.

‘Come, Signora,’ she said. ‘We must get back inside. You will be wet.’

‘I suppose so,’ said the American girl.

They went back along the gravel path and passed in the door. The maid stayed outside to close the umbrella.

As the American girl passed the office, the padrone bowed from his desk. Something felt very small and tight inside the girl. The padrone made her feel very small and at the same time really important. She had a momentary feeling of being of supreme importance. She went on up the stairs. She opened the door of the room. George was on the bed, reading.

‘Did you get the cat?’ he asked, putting the book down.

‘It was gone.’

‘Wonder where it went to,’ he said, resting his eyes from reading.

She sat down on the bed.

'I wanted it so much,' she said. 'I don't know why I wanted it so much. I wanted that poor kitty. It isn't any fun to be a poor kitty out in the rain.' George was reading again. She went over and sat in front of the mirror of the dressing table looking at herself with the hand glass. She studied her profile, first one side and then the other. Then she studied the back of her head and her neck.

'Don't you think it would be a good idea if I let my hair grow out?' she asked, looking at her profile again.

George looked up and saw the back of her neck, clipped close like a boy's.

'I like it the way it is.'

'I get so tired of it,' she said. 'I get so tired of looking like a boy.'

George shifted his position in the bed. He hadn't looked away from her since she started to speak.

'You look pretty darn nice,' he said.

She laid the mirror down on the dresser and went over to the window and looked out. It was getting dark.

'I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel,' she said. 'I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her.'

'Yeah?' George said from the bed.

'And I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles. And I want it to be spring and I want to brush my hair out in front of a mirror and I want a kitty and I want some new clothes.'

'Oh, shut up and get something to read,' George said. He was reading again.

His wife was looking out of the window. It was quite dark now and still raining in the palm trees.

'Anyway, I want a cat,' she said, 'I want a cat. I want a cat now. If I can't have long hair or any fun, I can have a cat.'

George was not listening. He was reading his book. His wife looked out of the window where the light had come on in the square. Someone knocked at the door.

'Avanti,' George said. He looked up from his book.

In the doorway stood the maid. She held a big tortoiseshell cat pressed tight against her and swung down against her body.

‘Excuse me,’ she said, ‘the padrone asked me to bring this for the Signora.’

Elements of the story

Setting

The story has a precise **setting** and namely in a hotel: “There were only two Americans stopping at the hotel.” The action took place in Italy because the staff of the hotel (the hotel-keeper, the maid) spoke Italian language. Because the room was situated on the second floor the couple had the opportunity to have a good panorama from their room. There was a public garden near the hotel and the war monument. The garden comprised big palm trees which beautify the garden. It was a rainy day and the square was empty. No one was outside except a waiter who stood in the café which was placed across the square. The writer pointed these settings directly, however he mentioned more than two times the war monument. In this way, the writer drew the attention, in an indirectly way, to the fact that the action took place after the war.

Plot Structure

The story opens with **an exposition** where the author depicts the two main characters of the story and the setting: “There were only two Americans stopping at the hotel”. Then he moved slowly to **the conflict of rising action** “The cat was trying to make herself so compact that she would not be dripped on.” As the story developed, the author revealed the conflict “I’m going down and get that kitty,’ the American wife said. ‘I’ll do it,’ her husband offered from the bed. ‘No, I’ll get it’”. When **the climax** was announced (“And I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles. And I want it to be spring and I want to brush my hair out in front of a mirror and I want a kitty and I want some new clothes.”), the reader could understand that the wife wanted a change and she was longing for the life that was before the war. She announced her wish to have a cat “If I can’t have long hair or any fun, I can have a cat.” That was the moment when came the **dénouement** (the outcome of the conflict). The narrator went on saying that George was not listening

and he was still reading his book when the maid brought “a big tortoiseshell cat” which the house-keeper sent to the wife. The author put an emphasis on the “tortoiseshell cat” which could represent the wife’s hope that there would come a change in their life.

Characters

Actually there are two main characters in the story (the American couple), and two minor characters (the house-keeper and the maid). Throughout the story it is evident that the cat was also present directly or indirectly in all the scenes, for example at the beginning of the story the wife saw the cat outside; then the woman talked at first with her husband about the cat, then with the house-keeper and finally the maid brought a cat. As a consequence, we can consider the cat as a minor character of the story.

The story is based on depicting the relationship of the American couple. It is very interesting that the wife had no name, but the author gave to her husband a name: George. This means that the husband was superior in that family. At the beginning of the story he was rather polite and he held a dialogue with his wife “I’m going down and get that kitty,” the American wife said. ‘I’ll do it,’ her husband offered from the bed.” Later on, he disguised himself and became more indifferent and rude toward his wife “Oh, shut up and get something to read,”. While her husband was nonchalant, the wife had a lot of wishes for their future and she wanted some changes in order to have their own home with all the necessary things “I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles”.

As the wife liked the house-keeper’s seriousness, politeness and dignity “The wife liked him. She liked the deadly serious way he received any complaints”. It becomes evident that she needed someone to talk to. The house-keeper was gentle and because of that he sent her a cat at the end of the story.

In a way, George's character represents everything the wife wants to escape. Her wish list is full of material goods, which can be seen as at odds with her

husband's fondness of intellectual fulfillment. George might sense her dissatisfaction with him, which would explain the slightly touchy "shut-up." Then again, he's just trying to read his darn book.

Analysis

Ernest Hemingway's story "Cat in the Rain" is a short story which depicts the relationship between an American couple which was affected by the consequences of the war period and they continued their existence facing the problem of misunderstanding and loneliness in a marriage. The writer focused his attention on the loneliness of the wife's heart because of the indifference of her husband, but on the other hand he underlined indirectly that many men came there to see the bronze war monument. So the writer described how that monument looked like, but in fact he might have described the monument with the aim of pointing the reader's attention to the fact that there was a war and the human continued to live but they did not forget about the tragic event.

"Cat in the Rain" was written in the 20th century and during that period many of the writers based their works on the consequence of the war describing the result of that tragic period upon the man's life and man's feelings. That's why in this very story the reader might find out that there was a lack of communication between those two married people. The wife and her husband George were so distanced that they even had no idea what one wanted and what was in their mind. One of them, namely George, was passionately reading his books ("...The husband went on reading, lying propped up with the two pillows at the foot of the bed. ") while his wife was longing for having someone to take care of ("I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her.").

The author began with depicting the characters of the story: The American couple. Then he described that they stood at a hotel near which was a war monument. The wife was looking through the window and she saw a cat which was in the rain. The wife wanted to take the cat, that's why she left the room. As she went downstairs, she had met the house-keeper. She liked him. When she went out she understood that the cat wasn't already there. Thus she returned to the hotel. She had a conversation with George, her husband. But George was not

listening. At the end of the story, the maid of the hotel brought a big cat to the wife from the part of the house-keeper.

The title of the story is a suggestive and a symbolic one. As we know, it is in the nature of the cats to dislike the rain at all. If it begins to rain, they hide where it is a warm place not to get wet. But in this case, the cat is "in the rain". The writer could emphasize the faintness of this cat to overcome the situation, the rain. It is unclear why the writer chose the cat. His choice might be commented that possibly he could compare the cat with the baby for whom the wife may want to devote her time and attention. The "cat" might have been the symbol of the wife's loneliness caused by the fact that her husband was incapable to understand her feelings. In other words, she probably needed more attention and compassion from the part of her husband.

To conclude, Hemingway's story "Cat in the Rain" deals with the most important problem of the humans that of the relationship in a couple. In fact, it is a story which highlights that there could not be a good relationship where the loneliness, the misunderstanding, selfishness and solitude exist. This story is suggestive even nowadays and it can serve as an example of how people shouldn't behave with the person's they love.