

Penguin



Readers

DUBLINERS

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Contents

Note about the stories	4
Before-reading questions	5
Araby	7
Eveline	13
Two Young Gentlemen	19
The Boarding House	28
A Little Cloud	35
A Painful Case	47
A Mother	55
The Dead	66
During-reading questions	96
After-reading questions	99
Exercises	100
Project work	107
Essay questions	108
Glossary	108

Araby

North Richmond Street, where I lived with my uncle and aunt, was a dead end, with only one way in or out. So, it was usually quiet, except when the other boys and I were **set** free from school. An empty house stood at the closed end of the street, but all the other houses looked at one another across the road.

A **priest** had lived in our house before we did. He had died in the back room. The cupboard behind the kitchen was full of his old papers, and among them I found a few books. One had yellow pages, and I liked that. There was an apple tree in the wild garden behind the house, as well as a few smaller trees. Under one of them I found the priest's old bicycle lamp. The priest had left all his money to the church, and his furniture to his sister.

When the short days of winter came, the sun went down before everyone in the street had finished their dinners. When I met Mangan and the other boys in the street to play, the houses were dark. The sky was a deep purple, and against it the light from the street lamps was pale and weak. The air was cold, and we played until our faces were hot and red. Our shouts rang through the empty street. We ran round the backs of the houses and, when we returned to the front, the lights from the kitchen windows made the street brighter. If my uncle appeared round the corner, we hid in the shadows until he was safely inside our

house. Or if Mangan's sister opened their front door to call her brother in, we watched her from the shadow. If she did not go back in the house and remained at the door, we left the shadow and walked to the bottom of Mangan's steps. His sister stood above us, with the door open, and we could see her body in the light behind her. Her brother always joked with her for a few minutes before he obeyed, and I stood in the street watching her. Her dress **swung** as she talked, and her long hair moved from side to side.

Every morning, I lay on the floor of our front room, watching her front door. When she came out of the house, my heart jumped. I ran to the hall, picked up my books and followed her. I kept my eyes on her until just before I had to turn off the street to go to school, and then I walked more quickly and passed her. This happened every morning. I had never spoken to her, except for one or two words, but her name was always in my head.

I kept her picture in my mind even in the least **romantic** places. On Saturday evenings, when my aunt went shopping, I had to go with her to carry some of the bags. We walked through busy streets, crowded with drunk people, past shouting boys and arguing men, and someone singing a song about the troubles of Ireland. I imagined leading Mangan's sister through these dangers. I did not know if I was ever going to speak to her or not, and, if I did speak, how I could tell her of my love. My body was like a **harp**, and her words and movements were like the fingers playing it.

At last, one evening, she spoke to me. I was so confused that at first I could not answer. She asked me if I was going to *Araby*. I forget whether I answered yes or no. It was always an excellent **bazaar**, she said, and she wanted to go.

“And why can’t you?” I asked.

As she spoke, she was turning a silver bracelet round her wrist. She could not go because she was going away on a trip with her church. Her brother and two other boys were playing down the street and I was alone with her. The lamp across the street showed her white neck and lit up her hair and her hand on the iron **railing**. It lit one side of her dress, too.

“It’s all right for you,” she said. “You can go if you want.”

“If I go,” I said, “I will bring you something.”

The next few days passed very slowly for me. By day in the classroom and at night in my bedroom, her face came between my eyes and the pages of the book I was trying to read. I was usually a good student, but now I answered few questions in class, and my teacher started to look at me angrily. He hoped I was not becoming lazy. The word *Araby* ran around my head. I asked my uncle and aunt if I could go to the bazaar on Saturday night and they agreed. My uncle said he would give me two **shillings** to spend.

On Saturday morning, I reminded my uncle that I wished to go to the bazaar. He was leaving for work.

“Yes, boy, I know,” he answered, crossly.

I left the house unhappily and walked to school.



When I came home in the evening my uncle was not yet back. It was early. I sat staring at the clock for some time and then went upstairs. From the front window I could see my friends playing in the street. I looked across at her house. I imagined I could see her neck and her hand and her dress. We sat down to dinner, but after an hour my uncle still did not come, and it was eight o'clock. I could not stay still, and I was walking around the room.

"I'm afraid you won't be able to go to the bazaar," said my aunt.

At nine o'clock I heard my uncle's key in the door. I waited until he was halfway through his dinner and then asked him to give me the money for the bazaar. He had forgotten.

"They'll all be in bed and asleep now." He laughed.

I did not smile.

"Can't you give him the money and let him go?" said my aunt.

My uncle said he was very sorry, he had forgotten.

Holding two shillings in my hand I walked quickly down Buckingham Street to the station. I sat in an empty train, and after a long wait it started to move slowly. After a few minutes, it stopped at an empty station. It was ten minutes to ten by the clock. I went out into the street, and in front of me was a large building with the magical name *Araby* above the door.

I could not find the children's entrance, and I was afraid that the bazaar was going to close, so I paid a tired man a shilling and went in the main entrance. I was in a big hall. Nearly all the **stalls** were closed and most of the hall was in darkness.

It was quiet, like a church after a **service**. A few people were standing around the stalls that were still open. I had come to buy something for Mangan's sister, so I went over to a stall that sold pretty painted cups and plates. A young lady was talking to two young men. I listened to their conversation and realized that their voices were English.

"Oh, I never said that!"

"Oh, but you did!"

"Oh, but I didn't!"

"Didn't she say that?"

"Yes, I heard her."

"Oh, it's not true!"

The young lady came over and asked me if I wished to buy anything. Her voice did not encourage me; she seemed not to be interested in me. I looked at two large pots at the entrance to the stall and whispered my answer.

"No, thank you."

The lady moved one of the pots a little and then went back to the two men. They were talking again, and once or twice she looked at me over her shoulder.

I waited a few moments, but it was hopeless. I turned away and walked down the middle of the bazaar. I heard a voice call that the lights were going out. The top of the hall was now dark.

Looking up at the darkness, I realized that I was a **fool** and my eyes burned with unhappiness and anger.