Section 2
Short Stories
Anton Chekhov (1860-1904)

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov is one of the most insightful and epoch-making dramatists and short story writers Russia has ever produced. His stories and plays have been hailed for their amazing originality and subtlety. As an atheist having a religious background and education, Chekhov combined a realistic approach with philosophic observation and a strong sense of humanity in his works. His plays and short stories are held in high esteem by writers and critics around the world. Some of his famous plays include *The Cherry Orchard, The Bear, Uncle Vanya, Three Sisters* etc. He wrote over 200 short stories of which some of the notable ones are *Vanka, A Blunder, The Black Monk, The Looking Glass, Dreams, A Work of Art, Gooseberries* etc. The social conditions that existed in Russia during his lifetime had a tremendous influence on Chekhov who wrote about them using a simple technique devoid of literary devices.

Focus

As a master of understatement and concealed meaning, Anton Chekhov is at his artistic best in *The Orator*. This story presents the embarrassing situation a gifted orator faces at a funeral ceremony. In this story Chekhov satirises the pretensions and hypocrisy of men. He spares no chance to unfold the human psyche even while narrating the story of a dead man put to grave.
The Orator

ONE fine morning the collegiate assessor, Kirill Ivanovitch Babilonov, who had died of the two afflictions so widely spread in our country, a bad wife and alcoholism, was being buried. As the funeral procession set off from the church to the cemetery, one of the deceased's colleagues, called Poplavsky, got into a cab and galloped off to find a friend, one Grigory Petrovitch Zapoikin, a man who though still young had acquired considerable popularity. Zapoikin, as many of my readers are aware, possesses a rare talent for impromptu speechifying at weddings, jubilees and funerals. He can speak whenever he likes, in his sleep, on an empty stomach, dead drunk or in a high fever. His words flow smoothly and evenly, like water out of a pipe, and in abundance; there are far more moving words in his oratorical dictionary than there are beetles in any restaurant. He always speaks eloquently and at great length, so much so that on some occasions, particularly at merchants' weddings, they have to resort to assistance from the police to stop him.

‘I have come for you, old man!’ began Poplavsky, finding him at home. ‘Put on your hat and coat this minute and come along. One of our fellows is dead, we are just sending him off to the other world, so you must do a bit of palavering by way of farewell to him. . . . You are our only hope. If it had been one of the smaller fry it would not have been worth troubling you, but you see it's the secretary . . . a pillar of the office, in a sense. It's awkward for such a whopper to be buried without a speech.’
‘Oh, the secretary!’ yawned Zapoikin. ‘You mean the drunken one?’

‘Yes. There will be pancakes, a lunch . . . you’ll get your cab-fare. Come along, dear chap. You spout out some rigmarole like a regular Cicero at the grave and what gratitude you will earn!’

Zapoikin readily agreed. He ruffled up his hair, cast a shade of melancholy over his face, and went out into the street with Poplavsky.

‘I know your secretary,’ he said, as he got into the cab. ‘A cunning rogue and a beast -- the kingdom of heaven be his -- such as you don't often come across.’

‘Come, Grisha, it is not the thing to abuse the dead.’

‘Of course not, aut mortuis nihil bene, but still he was a rascal.’

The friends overtook the funeral procession and joined it. The coffin was borne along slowly so that before they reached the cemetery they were able three times to drop into a tavern and imbibe a little to the health of the departed.

In the cemetery came the service by the graveside. The mother-in-law, the wife, and the sister-in-law in obedience to custom shed many tears. When the coffin was being lowered into the grave the wife even shrieked ‘Let me go with him!’ but did not follow her husband into the grave probably recollecting her pension. Waiting till everything was quiet again Zapoikin stepped forward, turned his eyes on all present, and began:

3. Identify a couple of instances of humour in the story.
‘Can I believe my eyes and ears? Is it not a terrible dream this grave, these tear-stained faces, these moans and lamentations? Alas, it is not a dream and our eyes do not deceive us! He whom we have only so lately seen, so full of courage, so youthfully fresh and pure, who so lately before our eyes like an unwearying bee bore his honey to the common hive of the welfare of the state, he who... he is turned now to dust, to inanimate mirage. Inexorable death has laid his bony hand upon him at the time when, in spite of his bowed age, he was still full of the bloom of strength and radiant hopes. An irremediable loss! Who will fill his place for us? Good government servants we have many, but Prokofy Osipitch was unique. To the depths of his soul he was devoted to his honest duty; he did not spare his strength but worked late at night, and was disinterested, impervious to bribes. . . . How he despised those who to the detriment of the public interest sought to corrupt him, who by the seductive goods of this life strove to draw him to betray his duty! Yes, before our eyes Prokofy Osipitch would divide his small salary between his poorer colleagues, and you have just heard yourselves the lamentations of the widows and orphans who lived upon his alms. Devoted to good works and his official duty, he gave up the joys of this life and even renounced the happiness of domestic existence; as you are aware, to the end of his days he was a bachelor. And who will replace him as a comrade? I can see now the kindly, shaven face turned to us with a gentle smile, I can hear now his soft friendly voice. Peace to thine ashes, Prokofy Osipitch! Rest, honest, noble toiler!’

4. How did Zapoikin praise the dead man?

5. What are the things that seemed strange in Zapoikin's speech?
Zapoikin continued while his listeners began whispering together. His speech pleased everyone and drew some tears, but a good many things in it seemed strange. In the first place they could not make out why the orator called the deceased Prokofy Osipitch when his name was Kirill Ivanovitch. In the second, everyone knew that the deceased had spent his whole life quarrelling with his lawful wife, and so consequently could not be called a bachelor; in the third, he had a thick red beard and had never been known to shave, and so no one could understand why the orator spoke of his shaven face. The listeners were perplexed; they glanced at each other and shrugged their shoulders.

‘Prokofy Osipitch,’ continued the orator, looking with an air of inspiration into the grave, ‘your face was plain, even hideous, you were morose and austere, but we all know that under that outer husk there beat an honest, friendly heart!’

Soon the listeners began to observe something strange in the orator himself. He gazed at one point, shifted about uneasily and began to shrug his shoulders too. All at once he ceased speaking, and gaping with astonishment, turned to Poplavsky.

‘I say! he's alive,’ he said, staring with horror.

‘Who's alive?’

‘Why, Prokofy Osipitch, there he stands, by that tombstone! He never died! It’s Kirill Ivanovitch who's dead.’

‘But you told me yourself your secretary was dead.’

6. Why did Zapoikin make a mistake about the identity of the deceased?
‘Kirill Ivanovitch was our secretary. You’ve muddled it, you queer fish. Prokofy Osipitch was our secretary before, that’s true, but two years ago he was transferred to the second division as head clerk.’

‘How the devil is one to tell?’

‘Why are you stopping? Go on, it's awkward.’

Zapoikin turned to the grave, and with the same eloquence continued his interrupted speech. Prokofy Osipitch, an old clerk with a clean-shaven face, was in fact standing by a tombstone. He looked at the orator and frowned angrily.

‘Well, you have put your foot into it, haven't you!’ laughed his fellow-clerks as they returned from the funeral with Zapoikin. ‘Burying a man alive!’

‘It's unpleasant, young man,’ grumbled Prokofy Osipitch. ‘Your speech may be alright for a dead man, but in reference to a living one it is nothing but sarcasm! Upon my soul what have you been saying? Disinterested, incorruptible, won't take bribes! Such things can only be said of the living in sarcasm. And no one asked you, sir, to expatiate on my face. Plain, hideous, so be it, but why exhibit my countenance in that public way! It's insulting.’
Notes

aut mortuis nihil bene: misquoted version of "De mortuis aut nihil aut bene" (of the dead speak well or not at all)

bribes: bribery was extremely common in Chekhov's Russia, particularly among the lower grade officials, who were paid inadequate salaries.

affliction: a cause of pain, suffering, or distress
deceased: dead
gallop: to move or progress swiftly
impromptu: prompted by the occasion rather than being planned in advance
palaver: a type of empty nonsense, a type of flattery
whopper: something exceptionally big or impressive
spout out: to boast about someone or something
rigmarole: nonsense
ruffle up: to disarrange
inexorable: unstoppable
disinterested: impartial
impervious: incapable of being affected
despise: to hate
seductive: attractive
renounce: to give up
perplexed: confused
hideous: grim
morose: gloomy (here withdrawn)
austere: strict or severe
muddle: to mix confusedly
queer fish: a strange person
grumble: to mutter discontentedly
expatiate: to speak or write at length or in detail
countenance: face
Understanding the story

1. What are the two afflictions that caused the death of Babilonov? Bring out the irony and sarcasm in the description.

2. How is Zapoikin described as an orator? His words are compared to ‘water out of a pipe’. Find out other images.

3. What are the incentives promised to Zapoikin for his speech? Explain the double standards behind such a speech.

4. How did Zapoikin present himself befitting to the occasion? Why are tears shed at the cemetery? What is the general truth the author wants to tell here?

5. What is the irony in the wife's shriek ‘Let me go with him’? Why couldn't she follow her husband? What does this show of the dead man and his wife? Is the characterization realistic? Substantiate.

6. What is the picture of the society you get from Zapoikin's speech?

7. Why did Profoky Osipitch blame Zapoikin of insulting him in public? What does this suggest about human nature?

8. Who do you think was more embarrassed, Zapoikin or Prokofy Osipitch? Why?

9. ‘Disinterested, incorruptible, won't take bribes! Such things can be said of the living in sarcasm.’ Do you agree with this? Do vices exceed in man so much so that his virtues cannot be praised? Comment.

10. The author unveils a conflict without revealing its magnitude while he exposes the mistake of the orator. How far does the author become successful in resolving the conflict and incorporating a twist at the end of the story?
Writing about the story

1. What, according to you, is the theme/themes of the story? To what extent does the author universalise the theme? Substantiate.

2. Death provides ample opportunities for analyzing human character in its variety. All the characters in the story including the dead man's wife present this philosophy of life through subtle characterisation and climatic moments. Write a critical appreciation of the story in terms of its theme, characterisation, tone and narration.

3. Sarcasm, irony, humour and satire are the devices with which Chekhov attempts his critique of the society. Evaluate the efficacy of these elements in the story.

ICT

Make a presentation on the origin and development of short story as a genre. You may make use of the following websites for collecting data.

- http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/william-boyd-short-history-of-the-short-story/#.UrpOlfuBWSo
William Sydney Porter, also known as O Henry, was an excellent writer and was famous for the surprise endings to all of his stories. Regarded as one of the most famous American storytellers, he pictured the lives of lower middle class New Yorkers in a humorous style. He presents contemporary American society through his 600 stories with a typical O Henry twist. By 1900, America began to rise and establish itself as one of the most industrialised countries in the world. Most of the urban people in the US were drawn to the American dream of getting rich. Some of the protagonists of O Henry are also caught in this whirlpool.

The Gift of the Magi, Cabbages and Kings, The Four Million, After Twenty Years, The Cop and the Anthem etc. are some of his most acclaimed short stories.

Focus

O Henry, in the story The Romance of a Busy Broker, presents Maxwell who indulges in stock-broking, a profession of core significance to capitalist growth. He works like a machine so much so that he forgets quite a few important things in his life.
Pitcher, confidential clerk in the office of Harvey Maxwell, broker, allowed a look of mild interest and surprise to visit his usually expressionless countenance when his employer briskly entered at half past nine in company with his young lady stenographer. With a snappy 'Good-morning, Pitcher,' Maxwell dashed at his desk as though he were intending to leap over it, and then plunged into the great heap of letters and telegrams waiting there for him.

The young lady had been Maxwell's stenographer for a year. She was beautiful in a way that was decidedly unstenographic. She forewent the pomp of the alluring pompadour. She wore no chains, bracelets or lockets. She had not the air of being about to accept an invitation to luncheon. Her dress was grey and plain, but it fitted her figure with fidelity and discretion. In her neat black turban hat was the gold-green wing of a macaw. On this morning she was softly and shyly radiant. Her eyes were dreamily bright, her cheeks genuine peach blow, her expression a happy one, tinged with reminiscence.

Pitcher, still mildly curious, noticed a difference in her ways this morning. Instead of going straight into the adjoining room, where her desk was, she lingered, in the outer office. Once she moved over by Maxwell's desk, near enough for him to be aware of her presence.

The machine sitting at that desk was no longer a man; it was a busy New York broker, moved by buzzing wheels and uncoiling springs.
'Well--what is it? Anything?' asked Maxwell sharply. His opened mail lay like a bank of stage snow on his crowded desk. His keen grey eye, impersonal and brusque, flashed upon her half impatiently.

'Nothing,' answered the stenographer, moving away with a little smile.

'Mr. Pitcher,' she said to the confidential clerk, 'did Mr. Maxwell say anything yesterday about engaging another stenographer?'

'He did,' answered Pitcher. 'He told me to get another one. I notified the agency yesterday afternoon to send over a few samples this morning. It's 9.45 o'clock, and not a single picture hat or piece of pineapple chewing gum has showed up yet.'

'I will do the work as usual, then,' said the young lady, 'until someone comes to fill the place.' And she went to her desk at once and hung the black turban hat with the gold-green macaw wing in its accustomed place.

He who has been denied the spectacle of a busy Manhattan broker during a rush of business is handicapped for the profession of anthropology. The poet sings of the 'crowded hour of glorious life.' The broker's hour is not only crowded, but the minutes and seconds are hanging to all the straps and packing both front and rear platforms.

And this day was Harvey Maxwell's busy day. The ticker began to reel out jerkily its fitful coils of tape, the desk telephone had a chronic attack of buzzing. Men began to throng into the office and call at him over the railing.
jovially, sharply, viciously, excitedly. Messenger boys ran in and out with messages and telegrams. The clerks in the office jumped about like sailors during a storm. Even Pitcher's face relaxed into something resembling animation.

On the Exchange there were hurricanes and landslides and snowstorms and glaciers and volcanoes, and those elemental disturbances were reproduced in miniature in the broker's offices. Maxwell shoved his chair against the wall and transacted business after the manner of a toe dancer. He jumped from ticker to 'phone, from desk to door with the trained agility of a harlequin.

In the midst of this growing and important stress the broker became suddenly aware of a high-rolled fringe of golden hair under a nodding canopy of velvet and ostrich tips, an imitation sealskin sacque and a string of beads as large as hickory nuts, ending near the floor with a silver heart. There was a self-possessed young lady connected with these accessories; and Pitcher was there to construe her.

'Lady from the Stenographer's Agency to see about the position,' said Pitcher.

Maxwell turned half around, with his hands full of papers and ticker tape.

'What position?' he asked, with a frown.

'Position of stenographer,' said Pitcher. 'You told me yesterday to call them up and have one sent over this morning.'
'You are losing your mind, Pitcher,' said Maxwell. 'Why should I have given you any such instructions? Miss Leslie has given perfect satisfaction during the year she has been here. The place is hers as long as she chooses to retain it. There's no place open here, madam. Countermand that order with the agency, Pitcher, and don't bring any more of 'em in here.'

The silver heart left the office, swinging and banging itself independently against the office furniture as it indignantly departed. Pitcher seized a moment to remark to the bookkeeper that the 'old man' seemed to get more absent-minded and forgetful every day of the world.

The rush and pace of business grew fiercer and faster. On the floor they were pounding half a dozen stocks in which Maxwell's customers were heavy investors. Orders to buy and sell were coming and going as swift as the flight of swallows. Some of his own holdings were imperilled, and the man was working like some high-gear ed, delicate, strong machine--strung to full tension, going at full speed, accurate, never hesitating, with the proper word and decision and ready and prompt as clockwork. Stocks and bonds, loans and mortgages, margins and securities--here was a world of finance, and there was no room in it for the human world or the world of nature.

When the luncheon hour drew near there came a slight lull in the uproar.

Maxwell stood by his desk with his hands full of telegrams and memoranda, with a fountain pen over his right ear and his hair hanging in disorderly strings over
his forehead. His window was open, for the beloved janitress Spring had turned on a little warmth through the waking registers of the earth.

And through the window came a wandering—perhaps a lost—odour—a delicate, sweet odour of lilac that fixed the broker for a moment immovable. For this odour belonged to Miss Leslie; it was her own, and hers only.

The odour brought her vividly, almost tangibly before him. The world of finance dwindled suddenly to a speck. And she was in the next room—twenty steps away.

'By George, I'll do it now,' said Maxwell, half aloud. 'I'll ask her now. I wonder I didn't do it long ago.'

He dashed into the inner office with the haste of a short trying to cover. He charged upon the desk of the stenographer.

She looked up at him with a smile. A soft pink crept over her cheek, and her eyes were kind and frank. Maxwell leaned one elbow on her desk. He still clutched fluttering papers with both hands and the pen was above his ear.

'Miss Leslie,' he began hurriedly, 'I have but a moment to spare. I want to say something in that moment. Will you be my wife? I haven't had time to make love to you in the ordinary way, but I really do love you. Talk quick, please--those fellows are clubbing the stuffing out of Union Pacific.'

'Oh, what are you talking about?' exclaimed the young lady. She rose to her feet and gazed upon him, round-eyed.

11. What other world was brought to Maxwell by the odour?

12. What word will you best choose to describe Maxwell? (lethargic/determined/workaholic)
'Don't you understand?' said Maxwell, restively. 'I want you to marry me. I love you, Miss Leslie. I wanted to tell you, and I snatched a minute when things had slackened up a bit. They're calling me for the 'phone now. Tell 'em to wait a minute, Pitcher. Won't you, Miss Leslie?'

The stenographer acted very queerly. At first she seemed overcome with amazement; then tears flowed from her wondering eyes; and then she smiled sunnily through them, and one of her arms slid tenderly about the broker's neck.

'I know now,' she said, softly. 'It's this old business that has driven everything else out of your head for the time. I was frightened at first. Don't you remember, Harvey? We were married last evening at 8 o'clock in the Little Church around the Corner.'
| **spectacle:** an impressive sight or view | **jerkily:** to move in sudden, abrupt motions |
| **throng:** to gather in large numbers | **jovially:** cheerfully |
| **viciously:** violently | **agility:** able to move quickly and easily |
| **harlequin:** an amusing character in traditional plays, wearing bright clothes | **canopy:** a layer of something that spreads over an area like a roof (here it refers to a hat) |
| **sacque:** a woman’s full, lease, hip-long jacket | **bickory:** a hard wood in North America |
| **construe:** to make understand an action in a particular way | **countermand:** to cancel an order that has been given |
| **seize:** to be quick to make use of a chance | **imperil:** to put something in danger |
| **lull:** a quiet period between times of activity | **janitress:** a caretaker |
| **tangibly:** that can be clearly seen and touched | **dwindle:** to become gradually less |
| **slacken:** to become less active |  |

**Understanding the story**

1. Read the story again and identify the following:

| **The setting** |  |
| **Time** |  |
| **The social background** |  |
| **The point of view** |  |
| **Theme** |  |
2. From what you have read in the story, give a description of a New York broker's office. Also state the similes and metaphors used to improve upon the description of the office by the writer.

3. ‘...the ‘old man’ seemed to get more absent-minded and forgetful every day of the world.' Who is the ‘old man’ referred to here? Does he deserve to be called so? Do you agree with this comment made by the clerk to the bookkeeper?

4. The writer tries to convey to the reader what is to come as the story progresses. Identify the different situations when the writer knowingly or unknowingly does so?

5. ‘...I want you to marry me. I love you, Miss Leslie. I wanted to tell you, and I snatched a minute when things had slackened up a bit...’ How romantic or unromantic is this? Comment.

Writing about the story

1. Do you think Maxwell is a successful man in his life? Why?

2. In the light of your reading, comment on the statement 'Modern world gives us many types of luxuries, but snatches away our real happiness and sense of humanity.'

3. Describe an instance of your own forgetfulness.

4. Collect stories of forgetfulness from the life of famous people and retell them.

ICT

The writer makes use of deft elements of surprise, suspense and foreshadowing in the story. You may read O Henry's ‘A Service of Love and Identity’ and compare instances of such elements used in both the stories. Present your findings before the class.
Katherine Mansfield (1889-1923)

Katherine Mansfield was the pen-name of Katherine Mansfield Bauchamp, who started writing stories at the age of nine. She was less concerned with the plot but good at presenting rare emotions and experiences. Her husband John Middleton Murray, the famous literary critic was a major influence in her life. During her short span of life she wrote a few stories which place her among the most important short story writers of the 20th century. The memories of her early youth give her works tenderness and picture-like qualities to her character. The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century was a period which witnessed great class distinctions. Katherine Mansfield was very sensitive to class distinctions and her sympathy always lay with the have-nots, though she usually wrote about the English upper class. The egoism and pretense of the bourgeois characters is treated with irony in her stories and this indeed is a mirror held up to the society of her times. A Dill Pickle, The Doll's House, The Garden Party, The Man without a Temperament and The Woman at the Store are some of her famous short stories.

Focus

A Cup of Tea is a representative story by Katherine Mansfield which ironically presents the complexity of domestic life through the responses of an upper class fashionable woman, Rosemary Fell. People often show generosity to those whom they consider inferior. The magnanimity they shower upon the deprived is only out of pretense to satisfy their ego. Such benevolent feelings evaporate when the recipient of pity moves against their self-interest and vanity. Rosemary, in the story is such a vain glorious character.
Rosemary Fell was not exactly beautiful. No, you couldn't have called her beautiful. Pretty? Well, if you took her to pieces.... But why be so cruel as to take anyone to pieces? She was young, brilliant, extremely modern, exquisitely well dressed, amazingly well read in the newest of the new books, and her parties were the most delicious mixture of the really important people and artists.

Rosemary had been married two years. She had a duck of a boy. And her husband absolutely adored her. They were rich, really rich, not just comfortably well-off, so if Rosemary wanted to shop she would go to Paris as you and I would go to Bond Street. If she wanted to buy flowers, the car pulled up at that perfect shop in Regent Street, and Rosemary inside the shop just gazed in her dazzled, rather exotic way, and said: 'I want those and those and those. Give me four bunches of those. And that jar of roses. Yes, I'll have all the roses in the jar. No, no lilac. I hate lilac. It's got no shape.' The attendant bowed and put the lilac out of sight, as though this was only too true; lilac was dreadfully shapeless. 'Give me those stumpy little tulips. Those red and white ones.' And she was followed to the car by a thin shop-girl staggering under an immense white paper armful that looked like a baby in long clothes....

One winter afternoon she had been buying something in a little antique shop in Curzon Street. It was a shop she liked. For one thing, one usually had it to oneself. And then the man who kept it was ridiculously fond of

1. How is Rosemary Fell described?
2. How was Rosemary's usual shopping?
serving her. He beamed whenever she came in. He clasped his hands; he was so gratified he could scarcely speak. Flattery, of course. All the same, there was something...

'You see, madam,' he would explain in his low respectful tones, 'I love my things. I would rather not part with them than sell them to someone who does not appreciate them, who has not that fine feeling which is so rare....' And, breathing deeply, he unrolled a tiny square of blue velvet and pressed it on the glass counter with his pale fingertips.

To-day it was a little box. He had been keeping it for her. He had shown it to nobody as yet. An exquisite little enamel box with a glaze so fine it looked as though it had been baked in cream. On the lid a minute creature stood under a flowery tree, and a more minute creature still had her arms round his neck. Her hat, really no bigger than a geranium petal, hung from a branch; it had green ribbons. And there was a pink cloud above their heads.

Rosemary took her hands out of her long gloves. She always took off her gloves to examine such things. Yes, she liked it very much. She loved it; it was a great duck. She must have it. And, turning the creamy box, opening and shutting it, she couldn't help noticing how charming her hands were against the blue velvet.

'Charming!' Rosemary admired the flowers. But what was the price? For a moment the shopman did not seem to hear. Then a murmur reached her. 'Twenty-eight guineas, madam.'
'Twenty-eight guineas.' Rosemary gave no sign. She laid the little box down; she buttoned her gloves again. Twenty-eight guineas. Even if one is rich... She looked vague. She stared at a plump tea-kettle and her voice was dreamy as she answered.

'Well, keep it for me—will you? I'll...'

But the shopman had already bowed as though keeping it for her was all any human being could ask. He would be willing, of course, to keep it for her for ever.

The discreet door shut with a click. She was outside on the step, gazing at the winter afternoon. Rain was falling, and with the rain it seemed the dark came too. There was a cold bitter taste in the air, and the new-lighted lamps looked sad. Sad were the lights in the houses opposite. Dimly they burned as if regretting something. And people hurried by, hidden under their hateful umbrellas.

Rosemary felt a strange pang. She pressed her muff against her breast; she wished she had the little box, too, to cling to. Of course the car was there. She'd only to cross the pavement. But still she waited. There are moments, horrible moments in life, when one emerges from a shelter and looks out, and it's awful. One oughtn't to give way to them. One ought to go home and have an extra-special tea. But at the very instant of thinking that, a young girl, thin, dark, shadowy—where had she come from?—was standing at Rosemary's elbow and a voice like a sigh, almost like a sob, breathed, 'Madam, may I speak to you a moment?'
‘Speak to me?’ Rosemary turned. She saw a little battered creature with enormous eyes, someone quite young, no older than herself, who clutched at her coat-collar with reddened hands, and shivered as though she had just come out of the water.

‘M-madam,’ stammered the voice. Would you let me have the price of a cup of tea?’

‘A cup of tea?’ There was something simple, sincere in that voice; it wasn't in the least the voice of a beggar. 'Then have you no money at all?' asked Rosemary.

'None, madam,' came the answer.

'How extraordinary!' Rosemary peered through the dusk and the girl gazed back at her. How more than extraordinary! And suddenly it seemed to Rosemary such an adventure. It was like something out of a novel by Dostoyevsky, this meeting in the dusk. Supposing she took the girl home? Supposing she did do one of those things she was always reading about or seeing on the stage, what would happen? It would be thrilling. And she heard herself saying afterwards to the amazement of her friends: 'I simply took her home with me,' as she stepped forward and said to that dim person beside her: 'Come home to tea with me.'

The girl drew back startled. She even stopped shivering for a moment. Rosemary put out a hand and touched her arm. ‘I mean it,’ she said, smiling. And she felt how simple and kind her smile was. ‘Why won't you? Do come home with me now in my car and have tea.’
'You—you don't mean it, madam,' said the girl, and there was pain in her voice.

'But I do,' cried Rosemary. 'I want you to. To please me. Come along.'

The girl put her fingers to her lips and her eyes devoured Rosemary. 'You're—you're not taking me to the police station?' she stammered.

'The police station!' Rosemary laughed out.

'Why should I be so cruel? No, I only want to make you warm and to hear—anything you care to tell me.'

Hungry people are easily led. The footman held the door of the car open, and a moment later they were skimming through the dusk.

'There!' said Rosemary. She had a feeling of triumph as she slipped her hand through the velvet strap. She could have said, 'Now I've got you,' as she gazed at the little captive she had netted. But of course she meant it kindly. Oh, more than kindly. She was going to prove to this girl that—wonderful things did happen in life, that—fairy godmothers were real, that—rich people had hearts, and that women were sisters. She turned impulsively, saying, 'Don't be frightened. After all, why shouldn't you come back with me? We're both women. If I'm the more fortunate, you ought to expect...'

But happily at that moment, for she didn't know how the sentence was going to end, the car stopped. The bell was rung, the door opened, and with a charming, protecting, almost embracing movement, Rosemary drew the other into the hall. Warmth, softness, light, a sweet scent, all

9. What did Rosemary want to prove? What did she do to make it a reality?
those things so familiar to her she never even thought about them, she watched that other receive. It was fascinating. She was like the rich little girl in her nursery with all the cupboards to open, all the boxes to unpack.

'Come, come upstairs,' said Rosemary, longing to begin to be generous. 'Come up to my room.'

And, besides, she wanted to spare this poor little thing from being stared at by the servants. she decided as they mounted the stairs she would not even ring to Jeanne, but take off her things by herself. The great thing was to be natural!

And 'There!' cried Rosemary again, as they reached her beautiful big bedroom with the curtains drawn, the fire leaping on her wonderful lacquer furniture, her gold cushions and the primrose and blue rugs.

The girl stood just inside the door; she seemed dazed. But Rosemary didn't mind that.

'Come and sit down,' she cried, dragging her big chair up to the fire, 'in this comfy chair. Come and get warm. You look so dreadfully cold.'

'I daren't, madam, said the girl, and she edged backwards.

'Oh, please,'-Rosemary ran forward- 'you mustn't be frightened, you mustn't, really. Sit down when I've taken off my things we shall go into the next room and have tea and be cosy. Why are you afraid?' And gently she half-pushed the thin figure into its deep cradle.

But there was no answer. The girl stayed just as she had been put, with her hands by her sides and her mouth

10. Describe Rosemary's bedroom. What was the girl's reaction on seeing it?
slightly open. To be quite sincere, she looked rather stupid. But Rosemary wouldn't acknowledge it. She leant over her, saying, 'Won't you take off your hat? Your pretty hair is all wet. And one is so much more comfortable without a hat, isn't one?'

There was a whisper that sounded like 'Very good, madam,' and the crushed hat was taken off.

'And let me help you off with your coat, too,' said Rosemary.

The girl stood up. But she held on to the chair with one hand and let Rosemary pull. It was quite an effort. And what was she to do with the coat now? She left it on the floor, and the hat too. She was just going to take a cigarette off the mantelpiece when the girl said quickly, but so lightly and strangely: 'I'm very sorry, madam, but I'm going to faint. I shall go off, madam, if I don't have something.'

'Good heavens, how thoughtless I am!' Rosemary rushed to the bell.

'Tea! Tea at once! And some brandy immediately!' The maid was gone again, but the girl almost cried out: 'No, I don't want no brandy. I never drink brandy. It's a cup of tea I want, madam.' And she burst into tears.

It was a terrible and fascinating moment. Rosemary knelt beside her chair.

'Don't cry, poor little thing,' she said. 'Don't cry.' And she gave the other her lace handkerchief. She really was touched beyond words. She put her arm round those thin, birdlike shoulders.
Now at last the other forgot to be shy, forgot everything except that they were both women, and gasped out: 'I can't go on no longer like this. I can't bear it. I can't bear it. I shall do away with myself.'

I can't bear no more.'

'You shant't have to. I'll look after you. Don't cry any more. Don't you see what a good thing it was that you met me? We'll have tea and you'll tell me everything. And I shall arrange something, I promise.

Do stop crying. It's so exhausting. Please'

The other did stop just in time for Rosemary to get up before the tea came. She had the table placed between them. She plied the poor little creature with everything, all the sandwiches, all the bread and butter, and every time her cup was empty she filled it with tea, cream and sugar. People always said sugar was so nourishing. As for herself she didn't eat; she smoked and looked away tactfully so that the other should not be shy.

And really the effect of that slight meal was marvellous. When the tea-table was carried away a new being, a light, frail creature with tangled hair, dark lips, deep, lighted eyes, lay back in the big chair. Rosemary lit a fresh cigarette; it was time to begin.

'And when did you have your last meal?' she asked softly.

But at that moment the door-handle turned.

'Rosemary, may I come in?' It was Philip.

'Of course.'

He came in. 'Oh, I'm so sorry,' he said, and stopped and stared.
'It's quite all right,' said Rosemary, smiling. 'This is my friend, Miss-'

'Smith, madam,' said the languid figure, who was strangely still and unafraid.

'Smith,' said Rosemary. 'We are going to have a little talk.'

'Oh yes,' said Philip. 'Quite,' and his eye caught sight of the coat and hat on the floor. He came over to the fire and turned his back to it. 'It's a beastly afternoon,' he said curiously, still looking at that listless figure, looking at its hands and boots, and then at Rosemary again.

'Yes, isn't it?' said Rosemary enthusiastically.

'Vile.'

Philip smiled his charming smile. 'As a matter of fact,' said he, 'I wanted you to come into the library for a moment. Would you? Will Miss Smith excuse us?'

The big eyes were raised to him, but Rosemary answered for her. 'Of course she will.' And they went out of the room together.

'I say,' said Philip, when they were alone. 'Explain. Who is she? What does it all mean?'

Rosemary laughing, leaned against the door and said. 'I picked her up in Curzon Street. Really. She's a real pick-up. She asked me for the price of a cup of tea, and I brought her home with me.'

'But what on earth are you going to do with her?' cried Philip.

'Be nice to her,' said Rosemary quickly. 'Be frightfully nice to her. Look after her. I don't know how. We haven't talked yet. But show her—treat her—make her feel—'
'My darling girl,' said Philip, 'you're quite mad, you know. It simply can't be done.'

'I knew you'd say that,' retorted Rosemary. Why not? I want to. Isn't that a reason? And besides, one's always reading about these things. I decided—'

'But,' said Philip slowly, and he cut the end of a cigar, 'she's so astonishingly pretty.'

'Pretty?' Rosemary was so surprised that she blushed. 'Do you think so? I—I hadn't thought about it.'

'Good Lord!' Philip struck a match. 'She's absolutely lovely. Look again, my child. I was bowled over when I came into your room just now. However... I think you're making a ghastly mistake. Sorry, darling, if I'm crude and all that. But let me know if Miss Smith is going to dine with us in time for me to look up The Milliner's Gazette.'

'You absurd creature!' said Rosemary, and she went out of the library, but not back to her bedroom.

She went to her writing-room and sat down at her desk. Pretty! Absolutely lovely! Bowled over!

Her heart beat like a heavy bell. Pretty! Lovely! She drew her cheque-book towards her. But no, cheques would be no use, of course. She opened a drawer and took out five pound notes, looked at them, put two back, and holding the three squeezed in her hand, she went back to her bedroom.

Half an hour later Philip was still in the library, when Rosemary came in.

'I only wanted to tell you,' said she, and she leaned against the door again and looked at him with her dazzled exotic gaze. 'Miss Smith won't dine with us to-night.'
Philip put down the paper. 'Oh, what's happened? Previous engagement?'

Rosemary came over and sat down on his knee.

'She insisted on going,' said she, 'so I gave the poor little thing a present of money. I couldn't keep her against her will, could I?' she added softly.

Rosemary had just done her hair, darkened her eyes a little and put on her pearls. She put up her hands and touched Philip's cheeks.

'Do you like me?' said she, and her tone, sweet, husky, troubled him.

'I like you awfully,' he said, and he held her tighter. 'Kiss me.'

There was a pause.

Then Rosemary said dreamily, 'I saw a fascinating little box to-day. It cost twenty-eight guineas. May I have it?'

Philip jumped her on his knee. 'You may, little wasteful one,' said he.

But that was not really what Rosemary wanted to say.

'Philip,' she whispered, and she pressed his head against her bosom, 'am I pretty?'

17. How does the story end? What does it tell about the character of Rosemary?

**exquisitely:** beautifully and delicately

**duck:** darling (here) a term of endearment

**Bond Street:** a street in London famous for fashion stores

**lacquer:** a liquid used on metal or wood to provide a hard shining surface

**comfy:** comfortable
Understanding the story

1. Was Rosemary Fell extremely rich? Give evidences to justify your answer.
2. Why did the shopkeeper tell Rosemary that he would rather not part with his things than sell them to someone who did not appreciate them?
3. How did Rosemary react on hearing the price of the box?
4. What seemed like an extraordinary adventure to Rosemary and what did she decide to do?
5. Is it only out of her kindness that Rosemary invites the girl for tea? What do you think?
6. 'She's absolutely lovely.' Why did Philip make such a remark about Miss Smith? What was his intention?
7. Rosemary told Philip that Miss Smith wouldn't dine with them as she insisted on leaving was it true? Why did she say so?
8. What were Rosemary’s reactions after hearing Philip's comments on Miss Smith? Was her behaviour unexpected? What does it tell about her character?
9. How can you interpret the odd behaviour of Rosemary towards the end of the story? What may be the reason for this?

Writing about the story

1. Is Rosemary possessive by nature? Sum up your reflections on Rosemary, the central character in the story, based on your reading of the story.
2. Descriptive details used by the writer help to conjure pictures in the reader's mind. How far is it true with Katherine Mansfield’s ‘A Cup of Tea’? Prepare a write-up presenting your views on the topic.
3. Compare and contrast the characters of Philip and Rosemary.
4. 'The egoism and pretentiousness of the upper class society is contrasted with the helplessness and fragility of the poor.' How far do the characters in the story illustrate this?

ICT

Arragne a quiz programme to test how well your friends have read the story. You may present the quiz using presentation software.
Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961)

Ernest Miller Hemingway is one of the most celebrated American fictionists. He was also a noted journalist. Hemingway's writings influenced many fictionists in the 20th century. He rebelled against the elaborate style of the 19th century writers and formed a style of his own which was simple, economic and explicit. Hemingway's style was shaped by his experiences of World War I, in which he had participated. Love, war, wilderness and loss form the themes of his works. Many of his works are considered as classics of American literature. Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954. Novels like The Sun also Rises, A Farewell to Arms, For Whom the Bell Tolls, The Old Man and the Sea and short story collections titled Men Without Women, The Fifth Column and The First Forty-Nine Stories etc. are some of his noted works.

Focus

A Canary for One which formed a part of the collection titled Men without Women, is a story with the quite simple plot of three people on a journey across Europe. Like all other stories of Hemingway, this story is also built around the tragedy of human relationships. The story is written in the typical Hemingway style- precise, laconic, devoid of emotions and sentiments, but concealing much beneath the surface, like an iceberg.
The train passed very quickly a long, red stone house with a garden and four thick palm trees with table under them in the shade. On the other side was the sea.

"I bought him in Palermo," the American lady said. "We only had an hour ashore and it was Sunday morning. The man wanted to be paid in dollars and I gave him a dollar and a half. He really sings very beautifully."

It was very hot in the train and it was very hot in the little salon compartment. There was no breeze came through the open window. The American lady pulled the window-blind down and there was no more sea.

There was smoke from many tall chimneys coming into Marseilles, and the train slowed down and followed on track through many others into the station. The train stayed twenty-five minutes in the station at Marseilles and the American lady bought a copy of the Daily Mail.

She walked a little way along the station platform, but she stayed near the steps of the car because at Cannes, where it stopped for twelve minutes, the train had left with no signal of departure and she had only gotten on just in time. The American lady was a little deaf and she was afraid that perhaps signals of departure were given and that she did not hear them.

As it was getting dark the train passed a farmhouse burning in a field. Motor-car were stopped along the road and bedding and things from inside the farmhouse were spread in the field. Many people were watching the house burn. After it was dark the train was in

1. Why did the lady stay near the door of the train when it stopped at Marseilles?

2. In which country does the story take place?
3. Why was the American lady unable to sleep at night?

Avington. People got off. At the news-stand Frenchmen, returning to Paris, bought that day's French paper.

Inside the lit salon compartment the porter had pulled down the three beds from inside the wall and prepared them for sleeping. In the night the American lady lay without sleeping because the train was a rapide and went very fast and she was afraid of the speed in the night. The American lady's bed was the one next to the window. The canary from Palermo, a cloth spread over his cage, was out of the draught in the corridor that went into the compartment, and all night the train went very fast and the American lady lay awake and waited for the wreck.

In the morning the train was near Paris, and after the American lady had come out of the washroom, looking very wholesome and middle-aged and American in spite of not having slept, and had taken the cloth off the bird-cage and hung the cage in the sun, she went back to the restaurant car for breakfast. When she came back to the lit salon compartment again, the beds had been pushed back into the wall and made into seats, the canary was shaking his feathers in the sunlight that came through the open window, and the train was much nearer Paris.

"He loves the sun," the American lady said. "He'll sing now in a little while."

"I've always loved birds. I'm taking him home to my little girl. There – he's singing now."

The train passed through many outside of Paris towns. There were tram-cars in the towns and big advertisements on the walls toward the train. For several
minutes I had not listened to the American lady, who was talking to my wife.

"Is your husband American too?" asked the lady.

"Yes," said my wife. "We're both Americans."

"I thought you were English."

"Oh, no."

"Perhaps that was because I wore braces," I said. I had started to say suspenders and changed it to braces in the mouth, to keep my English character.

"I'm so glad you're Americans. American men make the best husbands," the American lady was saying. "That was why we left the Continent, you know. My daughter fell in love with a man in Vevey. She stopped. "They were simply madly in love." She stopped again. "I took her away, of course."

"Did she get over it?" asked my wife.

"I don't think so," said the American lady. "She wouldn't eat anything and she wouldn't sleep at all. I've tried so very hard, but she doesn't seem to take an interest in anything. She doesn't care about things. I couldn't have her marrying a foreigner." She paused. "Someone, a very good friend told me once, no foreigner can make an American girl a good husband."

"No," said my wife, "I suppose not."

The train was coming into Paris. There were many cars standing on tracks – brown wooden restaurant cars and brown wooden sleeping cars that would go to Italy at five o'clock that night, if that train still left at five; the

6. Who are the main characters? What is their nationality?

7. What does the old lady think about American men?

8. Why did the old lady leave the Continent?

9. Why didn't the old lady approve of her daughter's lover?

10. How did the mother's intervention affect her daughter?
cars were marked Paris–Rome, and cars, with seats on the roofs, that went back and forth to the suburbs with, at certain hours, people in all the seats and on the roofs, if that were the way it were still done, and passing were white walls and windows of houses. Nothing had eaten any breakfast.

"Americans make the best husbands," the American lady said to my wife. I was getting down the bags. "American man are the only men in the world to marry."

"How long ago did you leave Vevey?" asked my wife.

"Two years ago this fall. It's her, you know, I'm taking the canary to."

"Was the man your daughter was in love with a Swiss?"
"Yes," said the American lady. "He was from a very good family in Vevey. He was going to be an engineer. They met there in Vevey. They used to go on long walks together."

"I know Vevey," said my wife. "We were there on our honeymoon."

"Were you really? That must have been lovely. I had no idea, of course, that she'd fall in love with him."

"It was a very lovely place," said my wife.

"Yes," said the American lady. "Isn't it lovely? Where did you stop there?"

"We stayed at the Trois Couronnes," said my wife.

"It's such a fine old hotel," said the American lady.
"Yes," said my wife. "We had a very fine room and in the fall the country was lovely."
"Were you there in the fall?"
"Yes," said my wife.
We were passing three cars that had been in a wreck. They were splintered open and the roofs sagged in.
"Look," I said. "There's been a wreck."

The American lady looked and saw the last car. "I was afraid of that all night," she said. "I have terrific presentiments about things sometimes. I'll never travel on a rapide again at night. There must be other comfortable trains that don't go fast."

The train was in the dark of the Gare de Lyon, and then stopped and porters came up to the windows. I handed bags through the windows, and we were out on the dim longness of the platform, and the American lady put herself in charge of one of three men from Cook's who said: "Just a moment, madame, and I'll look for your name."

The porter brought a truck and piled on the baggage, and my wife said good-bye and I said good-bye to the American lady whose name had been found by the man from Cook's on a typewritten page in a sheaf of typewritten pages which he replaced in his pocket.

We followed the porter with the truck down the long cement platform beside the train. At the end was a gate and a man took our tickets. We were returning to Paris to set up separate residences.

11. The old lady assumes the American husband and wife to be a perfect couple. How is the assumption proved wrong at the end of the story?
canary: a small, yellow bird that is known for its singing and sometimes kept as a pet
continent: Europe
splinter: break into small, sharp pieces
pre-sentiment: a feeling that something unpleasant is going to happen
sheaf: a number of things that are held together.

Understanding the story

1. Do you think that the old woman would have been a better narrator? Justify your answer.


3. Do you think disintegration of marriage is the theme of the story? Discuss.

4. What is the significance of the caged canary in the story? Does it represent anything?

5. Can we consider the train journey as a metaphor? Explain.

6. Discuss the title of the story.

7. How is the French Landscape described in the story? How does Hemingway’s use of imagery make the description more vivid?

8. A description of the climate is given at the beginning of the story. Does that description set an appropriate background for the theme?

9. Throughout the story, the American lady repeats that Americans make good husbands. But Hemingway has other ideas when he makes the lady say so. What is the underlying tone here?

10. Discuss the literary device employed by the author to create an unexpected ending to the story.
11. There is a description of a scene of wreck in the story. What is the significance of this description in the narrative?

12. Is the story built upon any conflict? Is it a conflict that goes on in the mind of the characters, or a conflict between the characters and their external circumstances?

**Writing about the story**

1. Hemingway juxtaposes the American ideal with the harsh reality in the story ‘A Canary for One’. Write an essay on the theme of the story in the light of this statement.

2. Attempt a character sketch of the old American lady.

3. Write a short paragraph on the ending of the story.

**ICT**

Make a presentation titled ‘Earnest Hemingway - Life and Works’. Make your presentation attractive with pictures/screenshots and illustrations. You may also include Hemingway’s quotable quotes in your presentation.

You may visit the following websites for collecting data for the presentation.

- http://www.hemingwayhome.com/
- http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/e/ernest_hemingway.html
Vaikom Muhammed Basheer (1908-1994)

Vaikom Muhammed Basheer was a Malayalam fiction writer. He was a humanist, freedom fighter, novelist and short story writer. He wrote effortless, natural and unpretentious prose. He was an active participant in the freedom movement, during which he became a political prisoner and spent eight years wandering throughout India and beyond, enduring adversity and meeting with adventures. Basheer’s major works include *Balyakalasakhi, Pathummayude Aadu, Premalekhanam, Shabdangal, Poovan Banana and the Other Stories* etc.

Focus

The short story, ‘A Man’ was originally titled ‘Oru Manushyan’ from the collection *Pavappettavarude Vesha* (1952). The translation of the story is done by V.Abdulla and is included in the title ‘Poovan Banana and Other Stories’. ‘A Man’ is a marvellous story of a man who is caught up in a difficult situation. He is saved from this situation by the same man who threw him into it indirectly. The story shows that there is an element of virtue even in a hardcore criminal. As always, Basheer seeks all-pervading virtue in this story as well.
You have no definite plans. You are wandering around far away from home. You have no money with you; you do not know the local language. You can speak English and Hindustani. But very few people know either of these languages. This can land you in many predicaments; many adventures can befall you.

You find yourself caught in a dangerous situation. A total stranger rescues you. Even after years pass by you will sometimes remember the man and wonder why he did so.

Let us say it is I, not you, who remembers the man.

I am now narrating an experience which I had. I have some vague notion about human beings, including myself. There are around me good men and thieves, who suffer from various infectious diseases and from madness – one has to live carefully. The world has more evil than good. We realise this only after we get hurt.

Let me record here that incident which was perhaps quite insignificant.

It was quite a big city in the valley of a mountain, some thousand five hundred miles from home; the inhabitants of which had never been known for the quality of mercy. They were a cruel people. Murder, robbery, pickpocketing, these were daily occurrences. By tradition the people were professional soldiers. Some of them went to distant places and lent out money on interest. Many others served as watchmen in banks, mills and large...
commercial establishments in big cities. Money was highly valued by them. For money they would do anything, even commit murder.

I stayed in that city in a very small, dingy room on a dirty street. I carried on a profession there: teaching English to some migrant labourers from nine-thirty till eleven in the night. I taught them to write addresses in English. Learning to write an address in English was considered great education there. You must have seen people who write address at the post office. They were paid anything between one anna and four annas for writing an address.

I taught the skill of writing address to people in order to escape the same fate myself and to see if I could save some money.

In those days I would sleep all day and wake up at four in the evening. This was to save the expense of drinking my morning tea or eating the noon meal.

One day I got up at 4 p.m. as usual. I finished my daily chores and stepped out for my tea and a meal. You must understand that I was dressed in a suit. I had a wallet in my coat pocket. I had fourteen rupees in it - my life's savings at the time.

I entered a crowded restaurant. I ate a full meal consisting of chapatis and meat curry. I drank tea as well. The bill came to eleven annas.

I put my hand in my coat pocket to pay it. I began sweating profusely and almost digested in an instant all that I had eaten! The reason was my wallet was not there.
I said, 'Someone has picked my pocket and taken away my wallet.'

It was a very busy restaurant. The owner gave a loud guffaw startling everyone around. He caught me by the lapels of my coat and shaking me, cried, 'This trick won't work here! Put the money down and go... or else I'll gouge your eyes out.'

I looked at the people around me. I did not see even one kind face. They had the look of hungry wolves. If he said he would gouge out my eyes, he would gouge them out!

I said, 'Let my coat be here; I'll go and bring some money.'

The restaurant keeper laughed again.

He asked me to take off my coat.

I took off my coat.

He asked me to take off my shirt.

I took off my shirt.

He asked me to take off both my shoes.

I took off both shoes.

Finally he asked me to take off my trousers.

So the idea seemed to be to strip me, gouge out my eyes and send me out naked!

I said, 'I have nothing on underneath!'

Everyone laughed.

The restaurant keeper said, 'I doubt it; you must have something on underneath.'

6. What is described as a trick by the owner of the restaurant?

7. Why do you think all those who assembled in the restaurant behaved so?
About fifty people repeated, 'There must be something on underneath.'

My hands refused to move. I saw in my imagination a man standing in the crowd, stark naked and without his eyes. Life was going to end like that. Let it end... And for all this, I... Never mind.... Oh creator of the world, my God.... I had nothing to say. Everything would end... everything would end to the satisfaction of all....

I began to undo one by one the buttons of my trousers. Then I heard a voice. 'Stop, I shall pay the money!'

Everyone turned in the direction of the voice.

There stood a fair-complexioned man, six foot tall, with a red turban and white trousers. He sported a handle-bar moustache and had blue eyes.

Blue eyes were quite common at this place. He came forward and asked the restaurant keeper, 'How much did you say it was?'

'Eleven annas.'

He paid the amount. He turned to me and said, 'Put on your clothes.'

I put them on.

'Come,' he called me. I went with him. Did I have words to express my gratitude? I told him, 'You have done a great deed. I have not seen a finer man.'

He laughed.

'What's your name?' he asked. I told him my name and where I came from.
I asked the man his name. He said, 'I have no name.'
I said, 'In that case "Mercy" must be your name.'
He did not laugh at that. He walked on until we reached a deserted bridge.
He looked all around. There was no one. 'Look, you must go away without turning round. If anyone asks you whether you have seen me you must say no.'
I understood.
He took out from his various pockets about five wallets. Five, among them was mine.
'Which of these is yours?'
I pointed to my wallet.
'Open it.'
I opened it. My money was there intact. I put it in my pocket.
He told me, 'Go. May God help you.'
I repeated, 'May... God help you!'

9. Do you think the title of the story is apt? Why?

**predicament**: an unpleasant troublesome situation  
**dingy**: shabby and dirty  
**profusely**: in plenty  
**guffaw**: to laugh loudly  
**startling**: to frighten  
**gouge**: to take out something by force
Understanding the story

1. 'They had the look of hungry wolves'. What is the narrator trying to convey through this?

2. What difference do you notice in the beginning of the story? What effect does it produce?

3. How is the feeling of the author when asked to remove his dress contrasted with the feeling he has when he got his wallet back?

4. What is the theme of the story?

5. Which, according to you, is the climax of the story?

6. Sketch the character of the restaurant owner.

Writing about the story

1. Assuming that the pickpocketer was not present in the restaurant at the right time, write an alternative ending to the story.

2. Select a story having a similar theme by Basheer or any other writer. Compare and contrast it with 'A Man'.

3. Prepare a critical appreciation of the story ‘A Man’.

ICT

Make a presentation on the issues of translating the story to ‘A Man’, after reading the Malayalam original titled Oru Manushyan. You may use a two column table in your presentation to show how typical Malayalam expressions are translated into English.
Ruskin Bond (1934 -)

Ruskin Bond is one of India's most prolific writers in English. Living in the foothills of the Himalayas, his writings are rich in descriptions about Indian rural life, culture, religion and the beauty of nature. His stories for children are noted for their fundamental Indian values like sanctity of family and respect for elders. His first novel, *The Room on the Roof* written when he was seventeen received the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1957. *Vagrants in the Valley, A Flight of Pigeons, The Blue Umbrella, Children's Omnibus, Angry River, Roads To Mussoorie* are some of his famous works. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1992 for his short story collection, *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*. He was awarded the Padma Sree in 1999 for his contributions to children's literature.

Focus

*The Night Train at Deoli* is about a chance encounter between a girl who sells baskets at the railway station and a boy of eighteen. The author transforms a momentary, fickle feeling into a deeper and profounder emotion through the exquisite charm of his narration. The anonymity of the girl and the mysterious backdrop of the railway station at Deoli add greatly to the romantic appeal of the story. The train journey in the story is not just a journey, but the journey of life which will become sweeter when there is something to hope for.
When I was at college I used to spend my summer vacations in Dehra, at my grandmother's place. I would leave the plains early in May and return late in July. Deoli was a small station about thirty miles from Dehra; it marked the beginning of the heavy jungles of the Indian Terrain.

The train would reach Deoli at about five in the morning, when the station would be dimly lit with electric bulbs and oil-lamps, and the jungle across the railway tracks would just be visible in the faint light of dawn. Deoli had only one platform, an office for the station master and a waiting room. The platform boasted a tea stall, a fruit vendor, and a few stray dogs; not much else, because the train stopped there for only ten minutes before rushing on into the forests.

Why it stopped at Deoli, I don't know. Nothing ever happened there. Nobody got off the train and nobody got in. There were never any coolies on the platform. But the train would halt there a full ten minutes, and then a bell would sound, the guard would blow his whistle, and presently Deoli would be left behind and forgotten.

I used to wonder what happened in Deoli, behind the station walls. I always felt sorry for that lonely little platform, and for the place that nobody wanted to visit. I decided that one day I would get off the train at Deoli, and spend the day there, just to please the town.

I was eighteen, visiting my grandmother and the night train stopped at Deoli. A girl came down the platform, selling baskets.
It was a cold morning and the girl had a shawl thrown across her shoulders. Her feet were bare and her clothes were old, but she was a young girl, walking gracefully and with dignity.

When she came to my window, she stopped. She saw that I was looking at her intently, but at first she pretended not to notice. She had a pale skin, set off by shiny black hair, and dark, troubled eyes. And then those eyes, searching and eloquent, met mine.

She stood by my window for some time and neither of us said anything. But when she moved on, I found myself leaving my seat and going to the carriage door. She noticed me at the door, and stood waiting at the platform, looking the other way. I walked across to the tea stall. A kettle was boiling over a small fire, but the owner of the stall was busy serving tea somewhere on the train. The girl followed me behind the stall.

'Do you want to buy a basket?' she asked. 'They are very strong, made of the finest cane….'

'No,' I said, 'I don't want a basket.'

We stood looking at each other for what seemed a very long time and then she said, 'Are you sure you don't want a basket?'

'All right, give me one,' I said, and I took the one on the top and gave her a rupee, hardly daring to touch her fingers.

As she was about to speak, the guard blew his whistle; she said something, but it was lost in the clanging of the bell and the hissing of the engine. I had to run back to my compartment. The carriage shuddered and jolted forward.
I watched her as the platform slipped away. She was alone on the platform and she did not move, but she was looking at me and smiling. I watched her until the signal box came in the way, and then the jungle hid the station, but I could still see her standing there alone.

I sat up awake for the rest of the journey. I could not rid my mind of the picture of the girl's face and her dark, smouldering eyes.

But when I reached Dehra the incident became blurred and distant; for there were other things to occupy my mind. It was only when I was making the return journey, two months later that I remembered the girl.

I was looking out for her as the train drew into the station and I felt an unexpected thrill when I saw her walking up the platform. I sprang off the foot-board and waved to her.

When she saw me, she smiled. She was pleased that I remembered her. I was pleased that she remembered me. We were both pleased, and it was almost like a meeting of old friends.

She did not go down the length of the train selling baskets, but came straight to the tea stall; her dark eyes were suddenly filled with light. We said nothing for some time but we couldn't have been more eloquent. I felt the impulse to put her on the train there and then, and take her away with me; I could not bear the thought of having to watch her recede into the distance of Deoli station. I took the baskets from her hand and put them down on the ground. She put out her hand for one of them, but I caught her hand and held it.

4. Why didn’t the narrator think of the girl once he reached Dehra?
'I have to go to Delhi,' I said.
She nodded. 'I do not have to go anywhere.'
The guard blew his whistle for the train to leave and how I hated the guard for doing that.
'I will come again,' and as she nodded, the bell changed and the train slid forward. I had to wrench my hand away from the girl and run for the moving train.
This time I did not forget her. She was with me for the remainder of the journey, and for long after. All that year she was a bright, living thing. And when the college term finished I packed in haste and left for Dehra earlier than usual. My grandmother would be pleased at my eagerness to see her.
I was nervous and anxious as the train drew into Deoli because I was wondering what I should say to the girl, and what I should do; I was determined that I wouldn't stand helplessly before her, hardly able to speak or do anything about my feelings.
The train came to Deoli, and I looked up and down the platform, but I could not see the girl anywhere.
I opened the door and stepped off the foot-board. I was deeply disappointed, and overcome by a sense of foreboding. I felt I had to do something, and so I ran up to the station-master and said, 'Do you know the girl who used to sell baskets here?'
'No, I don't,' said the station-master. 'You'd better get on the train if you don't want to be left behind.'
But I paced up and down the platform, and started over the railings at the station yard; all I saw was a mango tree and a dusty road leading into the jungle. Where did the road go? The train was moving out of the station, and I had to run up the platform and jump for the door of my compartment. Then as the train gathered speed and rushed through the forests, I sat brooding in front of the window.

What could I do about finding a girl I had seen only twice, who had hardly spoke to me, and about whom I knew nothing—absolutely nothing—for whom I felt a tenderness and responsibility that I had never felt before?

My grandmother was not pleased with my visit after all, because I didn't stay at her place more than a couple of weeks. I felt restless and ill-at-ease. So I took the train back to the plains, meaning to ask further questions to the station-master at Deoli.

But at Deoli there was a new station-master. The previous man had been transferred to another post within the past week. The new man didn't know anything about the girl who sold baskets. I found the owner of the tea stall, a small, shrivelled-up man, wearing greasy clothes, and asked him if he knew anything about the girl with the baskets.

'Yes, there was such a girl here, I remember quite well,' he said. 'But she has stopped coming now.'

'Why?' I asked. 'What happened to her?'

'How should I know?' said the man. 'She was nothing to me.'
And once again I had to run for the train.

As Deoli platform receded, I decided that one day I would have to break journey here, spend a day in the town, make enquiries, and find the girl who had stolen my heart with nothing but a look from her dark, impatient eyes.

With this thought I consoled myself throughout my last term in college. I went to Dehra again in the summer and when, in the early hours of the morning, the night train drew into Deoli station, I looked up and down the platform for signs of the girl, knowing I wouldn't find her but hoping just the same.

Somehow, I couldn't bring myself to break journey at Deoli and spend a day there. (If it was all fiction or a film, I reflected, I would have got down and cleared up the mystery and reached a suitable ending for the whole thing.) I think I was afraid to do this. I was afraid of discovering what really happened to the girl. Perhaps she was no longer in Deoli, perhaps she was married, perhaps she had fallen ill….

In the last few years I have passed through Deoli many times, and I always look out of the carriage window, half expecting to see the same unchanged face smiling up at me. I wonder what happens in Deoli, behind the station walls. But I will never break my journey there. I prefer to keep hoping and dreaming, and looking out of the window up and down that lonely platform, waiting for the girl with the baskets.

I never break my journey at Deoli, but I pass through as often as I can.
Understanding the story

1. Why does the boy say that Deoli would be soon left behind and forgotten?

2. Do you think the girl was also attracted towards the boy the same way he was? Why?

3. ‘I do not have to go anywhere’. This single utterance makes the girl a pathetic figure. Do you agree? Explain.

4. She said something to the boy which was lost in the clanging of the bell and the hissing of the engine. Can you guess what she said?

5. The boy would never break his journey there. He preferred to keep hoping and dreaming. Do you think he was in real love with the girl or it was merely an infatuation?

6. ‘If it was all fiction or a film. I would have got down and cleared up the mystery and reached a suitable ending for the whole thing’, says the narrator. How would you like the story to end? If so, what effect does it make?
Writing about the story

1. The girl is a motive for the traveler to pass through Deoli as often as he could. How?

2. ‘I used to wonder what happens in Deoli, behind the station walls.’ This sentence appears twice in the story. Do you find any significance? Explain.

3. Do you think that the girl in the story is a symbol of something? Justify your answer.

ICT

Browse the internet and find at least 5 short stories based on a train journey. You may read the stories and prepare a plot summary of each of the stories.