

Name: _____ Class: _____

Araby

By James Joyce
1913

James Joyce (1882-1941) was an Irish novelist and poet, famous for his influence on the modernist literary style. The following short story was published in 1914 in a collection of short stories entitled Dubliners, which depict the life of people of Dublin, Ireland during the early 20th century. As you read, consider what makes "Araby" a coming-of-age story.

[1] North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free. An uninhabited house of two storeys stood at the blind end, detached from its neighbours in a square ground. The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable¹ faces.

The former tenant of our house, a priest, had died in the back drawing-room. Air, musty from having been long enclosed, hung in all the rooms, and the waste room behind the kitchen was littered with old useless papers. Among these I found a few paper-covered books, the pages of which were curled and damp: *The Abbot*, by Walter Scott, *The Devout Communicant*, and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*. I liked the last best because its leaves were yellow. The wild garden behind the house contained a central apple-tree and a few straggling bushes, under one of which I found the late tenant's rusty bicycle-pump. He had been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister.



"Grafton Street in all its glory" by National Library of Ireland is in the public domain.

When the short days of winter came, dusk fell before we had well eaten our dinners. When we met in the street the houses had grown sombre. The space of sky above us was the colour of ever-changing violet and towards it the lamps of the street lifted their feeble lanterns. The cold air stung us and we played till our bodies glowed. Our shouts echoed in the silent street. The career of our play brought us through the dark muddy lanes behind the houses, where we ran the gauntlet² of the rough tribes from the cottages, to the back doors of the dark dripping gardens where odours arose from the ashpits, to the dark odorous stables where a coachman smoothed and combed the horse or shook music from the buckled harness. When we returned to the street, light from the kitchen windows had filled the areas. If my uncle was seen turning the corner, we hid in the shadow until we had seen him safely housed. Or if Mangan's sister came out on the doorstep to call her brother in to his tea, we watched her from our shadow peer up and down the street. We waited to see whether she would remain or go in and, if she remained, we left our shadow and walked up to Mangan's steps resignedly. She was waiting for us, her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door. Her brother always teased her before he obeyed, and I stood by the railings looking at her. Her dress swung as she moved her body, and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side.

1. **Imperturbable (adjective):** calm

Every morning I lay on the floor in the front parlour watching her door. The blind was pulled down to within an inch of the sash so that I could not be seen. When she came out on the doorstep my heart leaped. I ran to the hall, seized my books and followed her. I kept her brown figure always in my eye and, when we came near the point at which our ways diverged, I quickened my pace and passed her. This happened morning after morning. I had never spoken to her, except for a few casual words, and yet her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood.

- [5] Her image accompanied me even in places the most hostile to romance. On Saturday evenings when my aunt went marketing I had to go to carry some of the parcels. We walked through the flaring streets, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, amid the curses of labourers, the shrill litanies³ of shop-boys who stood on guard by the barrels of pigs' cheeks, the nasal chanting of street-singers, who sang a come-all-you about O'Donovan Rossa, or a ballad about the troubles in our native land. These noises converged in a single sensation of life for me: I imagined that I bore my chalice⁴ safely through a throng of foes⁵. Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand. My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom. I thought little of the future. I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of my confused adoration. But my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires.

One evening I went into the back drawing-room in which the priest had died. It was a dark rainy evening and there was no sound in the house. Through one of the broken panes I heard the rain impinge upon the earth, the fine incessant needles of water playing in the sodden⁶ beds. Some distant lamp or lighted window gleamed below me. I was thankful that I could see so little. All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves and, feeling that I was about to slip from them, I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: 'O love! O love!' many times.

At last she spoke to me. When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer. She asked me was I going to Araby. I forgot whether I answered yes or no. It would be a splendid bazaar; she said she would love to go.

'And why can't you?' I asked.

While she spoke she turned a silver bracelet round and round her wrist. She could not go, she said, because there would be a retreat that week in her convent. Her brother and two other boys were fighting for their caps, and I was alone at the railings. She held one of the spikes, bowing her head towards me. The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease.

- [10] 'It's well for you,' she said.

'If I go,' I said, 'I will bring you something.'

2. In this context, "ran the gauntlet" means to organize challenges among other kids in the neighborhood.

3. **Litany (noun):** a repetitive list

4. a large cup used for drinking wine in ceremony

5. **Foe (noun):** enemy

6. **Sodden (adjective):** saturated

What innumerable follies⁷ laid waste my waking and sleeping thoughts after that evening! I wished to annihilate the tedious intervening days. I chafed against the work of school. At night in my bedroom and by day in the classroom her image came between me and the page I strove to read. The syllables of the word Araby were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me. I asked for leave to go to the bazaar⁸ on Saturday night. My aunt was surprised, and hoped it was not some Freemason affair. I answered few questions in class. I watched my master's face pass from amiability to sternness; he hoped I was not beginning to idle. I could not call my wandering thoughts together. I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life which, now that it stood between me and my desire, seemed to me child's play, ugly monotonous child's play.

On Saturday morning I reminded my uncle that I wished to go to the bazaar in the evening. He was fussing at the hallstand, looking for the hat-brush, and answered me curtly:

'Yes, boy, I know.'

- [15] As he was in the hall I could not go into the front parlour and lie at the window. I felt the house in bad humour and walked slowly towards the school. The air was pitilessly raw and already my heart misgave me.

When I came home to dinner my uncle had not yet been home. Still it was early. I sat staring at the clock for some time and, when its ticking began to irritate me, I left the room. I mounted the staircase and gained the upper part of the house. The high, cold, empty, gloomy rooms liberated me and I went from room to room singing. From the front window I saw my companions playing below in the street. Their cries reached me weakened and indistinct and, leaning my forehead against the cool glass, I looked over at the dark house where she lived. I may have stood there for an hour, seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination, touched discreetly by the lamplight at the curved neck, at the hand upon the railings and at the border below the dress.

When I came downstairs again I found Mrs Mercer sitting at the fire. She was an old, garrulous⁹ woman, a pawnbroker's widow, who collected used stamps for some pious purpose. I had to endure the gossip of the tea-table. The meal was prolonged beyond an hour and still my uncle did not come. Mrs Mercer stood up to go: she was sorry she couldn't wait any longer, but it was after eight o'clock and she did not like to be out late, as the night air was bad for her. When she had gone I began to walk up and down the room, clenching my fists. My aunt said:

'I'm afraid you may put off your bazaar for this night of Our Lord.'

At nine o'clock I heard my uncle's latchkey in the hall door. I heard him talking to himself and heard the hallstand rocking when it had received the weight of his overcoat. I could interpret these signs. When he was midway through his dinner I asked him to give me the money to go to the bazaar. He had forgotten.

- [20] 'The people are in bed and after their first sleep now,' he said.

I did not smile. My aunt said to him energetically:

7. **Folly** (*noun*): a foolish act
8. **Bazaar** (*noun*): a market
9. **Garrulous** (*adjective*): talkative

'Can't you give him the money and let him go? You've kept him late enough as it is.'

My uncle said he was very sorry he had forgotten. He said he believed in the old saying: 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.' He asked me where I was going and, when I told him a second time, he asked me did I know The Arab's Farewell to his Steed. When I left the kitchen he was about to recite the opening lines of the piece to my aunt.

I held a florin¹⁰ tightly in my hand as I strode down Buckingham Street towards the station. The sight of the streets thronged with buyers and glaring with gas recalled to me the purpose of my journey. I took my seat in a third-class carriage of a deserted train. After an intolerable delay the train moved out of the station slowly. It crept onward among ruinous¹¹ houses and over the twinkling river. At Westland Row Station a crowd of people pressed to the carriage doors; but the porters moved them back, saying that it was a special train for the bazaar. I remained alone in the bare carriage. In a few minutes the train drew up beside an improvised wooden platform. I passed out on to the road and saw by the lighted dial of a clock that it was ten minutes to ten. In front of me was a large building which displayed the magical name.

[25] I could not find any sixpenny entrance and, fearing that the bazaar would be closed, I passed in quickly through a turnstile, handing a shilling to a weary-looking man. I found myself in a big hall girded at half its height by a gallery. Nearly all the stalls were closed and the greater part of the hall was in darkness. I recognized a silence like that which pervades a church after a service. I walked into the centre of the bazaar timidly. A few people were gathered about the stalls which were still open. Before a curtain, over which the words *Café Chantant* were written in coloured lamps, two men were counting money on a salver. I listened to the fall of the coins.

Remembering with difficulty why I had come, I went over to one of the stalls and examined porcelain vases and flowered tea-sets. At the door of the stall a young lady was talking and laughing with two young gentlemen. I remarked their English accents and listened vaguely to their conversation.

'O, I never said such a thing!'

'O, but you did!'

'O, but I didn't!'

[30] 'Didn't she say that?'

'Yes. I heard her.'

'O, there's a... fib!'

Observing me, the young lady came over and asked me did I wish to buy anything. The tone of her voice was not encouraging; she seemed to have spoken to me out of a sense of duty. I looked humbly at the great jars that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall and murmured:

10. A florin is an old form of British money.

11. **Ruinous (adjective):** Disastrous

'No, thank you.'

[35] The young lady changed the position of one of the vases and went back to the two young men. They began to talk of the same subject. Once or twice the young lady glanced at me over her shoulder.

I lingered before her stall, though I knew my stay was useless, to make my interest in her wares seem the more real. Then I turned away slowly and walked down the middle of the bazaar. I allowed the two pennies to fall against the sixpence in my pocket. I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light was out. The upper part of the hall was now completely dark.

Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided¹² by vanity¹³; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.

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12. **Deride** (*verb*): to express dislike for; to ridicule

13. **Vanity** (*noun*): excessive pride in one's appearance, qualities, abilities, achievements, etc.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which of the following quotes best embodies how the narrator regards Mangan's sister?
 - A. "Her dress swung as she moved her body, and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side." (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "But my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires." (Paragraph 5)
 - C. "I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes." (Paragraph 5)
 - D. "At last she spoke to me. When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer." (Paragraph 7)

2. PART A: What does the word "tedious" most likely mean as used in paragraph 12?
 - A. Dull
 - B. Distracting
 - C. Fast-paced
 - D. Annoying

3. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "...her image came between me and the page I strove to read."
 - B. "The syllables of the word Araby were called to me through the silence"
 - C. "I could not call my wandering thoughts together."
 - D. "I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life..."

4. PART A: How does the narrator's envisioning of the bazaar differ from his actual experience at the bazaar?
 - A. Fueled by desire, he imagines the bazaar as a magical place where he will find something for his love, but when he gets there it is unwelcoming and quite deserted.
 - B. The narrator thinks he will win his love with something from the bazaar, but when he arrives there is nothing good enough to buy.
 - C. The narrator imagines the bazaar will be bustling with people, so he is disappointed with how alone he is when he arrives.
 - D. He envisions the bazaar as the end of his quest, but upon arriving it is distinctly unromantic.

5. PART B: What does this difference in the settings reveal about the narrator's point of view and how it develops over the course of the story?
- A. This difference reveals the limitations of the narrator's point of view; when confronted with reality he continues to persist in his delusion even after they shut the bazaar down.
 - B. This difference reveals that the narrator's point of view was previously clouded; by the end of the story he is disillusioned by reality.
 - C. This difference reveals that the narrator's point of view has become more closed off, just as the narrator stands in the dark.
 - D. This difference reveals how one-track minded and limited the narrator's point of view is up until he arrives at the bazaar, in which he can begin to focus on himself rather than his crush.
6. Which of the following best describes how the themes of the story – love and growing up – interact with each other?
- A. The narrator believes that falling in love with Mangan's sister is equivalent to his coming of age.
 - B. The narrator believes he can only grow up once he has won the heart of his crush.
 - C. It is only through his epiphany at the end of the story, driven by his "love" for Mangan's sister, that the narrator comes of age.
 - D. Once the narrator realizes there are other forms of love beyond romantic he takes the first step towards growing up.
7. How does the word "blind" used to describe the narrator's street at the beginning of the story resonate with the rest of the text? Consider any figurative meanings of the word and any related motifs in your answer.

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. Some critics read this as a story about the inevitable realization that childhood fantasies don't represent reality. How is this a story about the disappearance of childhood illusion?
2. Reread the last line of this story. How is the narrator a "creature driven and derided by vanity?"
3. Is there something inherently vain about childhood? Explain your answer.
4. In this context of this story, what does it mean to be grown up?