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For P.G SEM-IV

I have completed all the short stories of your syllabus by James Joyce and given note on them. I have not given any note on "The Dead." Now I want to give you some idea regarding "The Dead".

"The Dead" is the final short story in the 1914 collection *Dubliners* by James Joyce. The other stories in the collection are shorter, whereas at 15,952 words, "The Dead" is almost long enough to be described as a novella.

The story deals with themes of love and loss as well as raising questions about the nature of the Irish identity.

Characters

Gabriel Conroy – the main character of the story.

15 Usher's Island, the house once partly rented by Joyce's great aunts which was the model for "the dark gaunt house on Usher's Island", the principal setting for the story

King William Statue, Dame Street, Dublin

Kate Morkan and Julia Morkan – Gabriel and Mary Jane's aunts. They are elderly sisters who throw a party every year during Christmas time.

Mary Jane Morkan – niece of Kate and Julia Morkan.

Lily – the caretaker's daughter.

Gretta Conroy – Gabriel's wife.

Molly Ivors – a long-time acquaintance of the family

Mr Browne – only Protestant guest at the party.

Freddy Malins – an alcoholic and friend of family.

Mrs Malins – Freddy Malins' mother.

Bartell D'Arcy – a tenor.

Gabriel Conroy, Gretta Conroy, Kate and Julia Morkan, and Bartell d'Arcy are all alluded to in James Joyce's later work, *Ulysses*, though no character from "The Dead" makes a direct appearance in the novel.

The story centres on Gabriel Conroy, a teacher and part-time book reviewer, and explores the relationships he has with his family and friends. Gabriel and his wife, Gretta, arrive late to an annual Christmas party hosted by his aunts, Kate and Julia Morkan, who eagerly receive him. After a somewhat awkward encounter with Lily, the caretaker's daughter, Gabriel goes upstairs and joins the rest of the party attendees. Gabriel worries about the speech he has to give, especially because it contains academic references that he fears his audience will not understand. When Freddy Malins arrives drunk, as the hosts of the party had feared, Aunt Kate asks Gabriel to make sure he is all right.

As the party moves on, Gabriel is confronted by Miss Ivors, an Irish nationalist, about his

publishing a weekly literary column in the Unionist newspaper *The Daily Express*. She teases him as a "West Briton," that is, a supporter of English political control of Ireland. Gabriel recalls that he gets 15 shillings a week and "the books he received for review were almost more welcome than the paltry cheque". He thinks this charge is highly unfair, but fails to offer a satisfactory rejoinder. The encounter ends awkwardly, which bothers Gabriel the rest of the night. He becomes more disaffected when he tells his wife of the encounter and she expresses an interest in returning to visit her childhood home of Galway. The music and party continues, but Gabriel retreats into himself, thinking of the snow outside and his impending speech.

Dinner begins, with Gabriel seated at the head of the table. The guests discuss music and the practices of certain monks. Once the dining has died down, Gabriel thinks once more about the snow and begins his speech, praising traditional Irish hospitality, observing that "we are living in a sceptical...thought-tormented age,"^[1] and referring to Aunt Kate, Aunt Julia and Mary Jane as the Three Graces. The speech ends with a toast, and the guests sing "For they are jolly gay fellows."

The party was winding down, and as the guests filter out and Gabriel prepares to leave, he finds his wife standing, apparently lost in thought, at the top of the stairs. From another room, Bartell D'Arcy singing "The Lass of Aughrim" can be heard. The Conroys left and Gabriel is excited, for it has been a long time since he and Gretta have had a night in a hotel to themselves. When they arrived at the hotel, Gabriel's aspirations of passionate lovemaking are conclusively dashed by Gretta's lack of interest. He presses her about what is bothering her, and she admits that she is "thinking about that song, *The Lass of Aughrim*."^[2] She admits that it reminds her of someone, a young man named Michael Furey, who had courted her in her youth in Galway. He used to sing *The Lass of Aughrim* for her. Furey died at seventeen, early in their relationship, and she had been very much in love with him. She believes that it was his insistence on coming to meet her in the winter and the rain, while already sick, that killed him. After telling these things to Gabriel, Gretta falls asleep. At first, Gabriel is shocked and dismayed that there was something of such significance in his wife's life that he never knew about. He ponders the role of the countless dead in living people's lives, and observes that everyone he knows, himself included, will one day only be a memory. He finds in this fact a profound affirmation of life. Gabriel stands at the window, watching the snow fall, and the narrative expands past him, edging into the surreal and encompassing the entirety of Ireland. As the story ends, we are told that "His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead."^[3]

Story in brief.

At the annual dance and dinner party held by Kate and Julia Morkan and their young niece, Mary Jane Morkan, the housemaid Lily frantically greets guests. Set at or just before the feast of the Epiphany on January 6, which celebrates the manifestation of Christ's divinity to the Magi, the party draws together a variety of relatives and friends. Kate and Julia particularly await the arrival of their favorite nephew, Gabriel Conroy, and his wife, Gretta. When they arrive, Gabriel attempts to chat with Lily as she takes his coat, but she snaps in reply to his question about her love life. Gabriel ends the uncomfortable exchange by giving Lily a generous tip, but the experience makes him anxious. He relaxes when he joins his aunts and Gretta, though Gretta's good-natured teasing about his dedication to galoshes

irritates him. They discuss their decision to stay at a hotel that evening rather than make the long trip home. The arrival of another guest, the always-drunk Freddy Malins, disrupts the conversation. Gabriel makes sure that Freddy is fit to join the party while the guests chat over drinks in between taking breaks from the dancing. An older gentleman, Mr. Browne, flirts with some young girls, who dodge his advances. Gabriel steers a drunken Freddy toward the drawing room to get help from Mr. Browne, who attempts to sober Freddy up.

The party continues with a piano performance by Mary Jane. More dancing follows, which finds Gabriel paired up with Miss Ivors, a fellow university instructor. A fervent supporter of Irish culture, Miss Ivors embarrasses Gabriel by labelling him a "West Briton" for writing literary reviews for a conservative newspaper. Gabriel dismisses the accusation, but Miss Ivors pushes the point by inviting Gabriel to visit the Aran Isles, where Irish is spoken, during the summer. When Gabriel declines, explaining that he has arranged a cycling trip on the continent, Miss Ivors corners him about his lack of interest in his own country. Gabriel exclaims that he is sick of Ireland. After the dance, he flees to a corner and engages in a few more conversations, but he cannot forget the interlude with Miss Ivors.

Just before dinner, Julia sings a song for the guests. Miss Ivors makes her exit to the surprise of Mary Jane and Gretta, and to the relief of Gabriel. Finally, dinner is ready, and Gabriel assumes his place at the head of the table to carve the goose. After much fussing, everyone eats, and finally Gabriel delivers his speech, in which he praises Kate, Julia, and Mary Jane for their hospitality. Framing this quality as an Irish strength, Gabriel laments the present age in which such hospitality is undervalued. Nevertheless, he insists, people must not linger on the past and the dead, but live and rejoice in the present with the living. The table breaks into a loud applause for Gabriel's speech, and the entire party toasts their three hostesses.

Later, guests begin to leave, and Gabriel recounts a story about his grandfather and his horse, which forever walked in circles even when taken out of the mill where it worked. After finishing the anecdote, Gabriel realizes that Gretta stands transfixed by the song that Mr. Bartell D'Arcy sings in the drawing room. When the music stops and the rest of the party guests assemble before the door to leave, Gretta remains detached and thoughtful. Gabriel is enamoured with and preoccupied by his wife's mysterious mood and recalls their courtship as they walk from the house and catch a cab into Dublin.

At the hotel, Gabriel grows irritated by Gretta's behaviour. She does not seem to share his romantic inclinations, and in fact bursts into tears. Gretta confesses that she has been thinking of the song from the party because a former lover had sung it to her in her youth in Galway. Gretta recounts the sad story of this boy, Michael Furey, who died after waiting outside of her window in the cold. Gretta later falls asleep, but Gabriel remains awake, disturbed by Gretta's new information. He curls up on the bed, contemplating his own mortality. Seeing the snow at the window, he envisions it blanketing the graveyard where Michael Furey rests, as well as all of Ireland.

Analysis

In "The Dead," Gabriel Conroy's restrained behaviour and his reputation with his aunts as the nephew who takes care of everything mark him as a man of authority and caution, but two encounters with women at the party challenge his confidence. First, Gabriel clumsily provokes a defensive statement from the overworked Lily when he asks her about her love

life. Instead of apologizing or explaining what he meant, Gabriel quickly ends the conversation by giving Lily a holiday tip. He blames his prestigious education for his inability to relate to servants like Lily, but his willingness to let money speak for him suggests that he relies on the comforts of his class to maintain distance. The encounter with Lily shows that Gabriel, like his aunts, cannot tolerate a "back answer," but he is unable to avoid such challenges as the party continues. During his dance with Miss Ivors, he faces a barrage of questions about his non-existent nationalist sympathies, which he doesn't know how to answer appropriately. Unable to compose a full response, Gabriel blurts out that he is sick of his own country, surprising Miss Ivors and himself with his unmeasured response and his loss of control.