ESL/EFL My Own Resources
http://www.miguelmllop.com

John Steinbeck (1902-68)

John Steinbeck was a native of California, U.S.A., and many of his stories concern the lives of those, originally from many different cultures, who settled there, often as farmers and ranchers. He is among the best-known American writers of this century and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962. His novels include `Tortilla Flat' (1935), `Of Mice and Men' (1937), `The Grapes of Wrath' (1939) and `East of Eden' (1952). `The Murder' comes from the collection of short stories `The Long Valley', originally published in 1938.

The story

`The Murder' is set in the early days of settlement in California. It is the story of a marriage between people of different nationalities, of the violent climax to the growing problem between them and of the surprising outcome.

The Murder

This happened a number of years ago in Monterey County, in central California. The Cañon del Castillo is one of those valleys in the Santa Lucia range* which lie between its many spurs and ridges.* From the main Cañon del Castillo a number of little arroyos* cut back into the mountains, oak-wooded canyons,* heavily brushed with poison oak and sage. At the head of the canyon there stands a tremendous stone castle, buttressed* and towered like those strongholds the Crusaders* put up in the path of their conquests. Only a close visit to the castle shows it to be a strange accident of time and water and erosion working on soft, stratified sandstone.* In the distance the ruined battlements, the gates, the towers, even the arrow slits, require little imagination to make out.

Below the castle, on the nearly level floor of the canyon, stand the old ranch* house, a weathered and mossy barn and a warped* feeding-shed for cattle. The house is deserted; the doors, swinging on rusted hinges, squeal and bang on nights when the wind courses down from the castle. Not many people visit the house. Sometimes a crowd of boys tramp through the rooms, peering into empty closets and loudly defying* the ghosts they deny.

Jim Moore, who owns the land, does not like to have people about the house. He rides up from his new house, farther down the valley, and chases the boys away. He has put `No Trespassing'* signs on his fences to keep curious and morbid* people out. Sometimes he thinks of burning the old house down, but then a strange and powerful relation with the swinging doors, the blind and desolate windows, forbids* the destruction. If he should burn the house he would destroy a great and important piece of his life. He knows that when he goes to town with his plump* and still pretty wife, people turn and look at his retreating back with awe* and some admiration.

Jim Moore was born in the old house and grew up in it. He knew every grained and weathered board of the barn, every smooth, worn manger-rack.* His mother and father were both dead when he was thirty. He celebrated his majority* by raising a beard. He sold the pigs and decided never to have any more. At last he bought a fine Guernsey bull to improve his stock, and he began to go to Monterey on Saturday nights, to get drunk and to talk with the noisy girls of the Three Star.

Within a year Jim Moore married Jelka Sepic, a Jugo-Slav girl, daughter of a heavy and patient farmer of Pine Canyon. Jim was not proud of her foreign family, of her many brothers and sisters and cousins, but he delighted in her beauty. Jelka had eyes as large and questioning as a doe's* eyes. Her nose was thin and sharply faceted, and her lips were deep and soft. Jelka's skin always startled* Jim, for between night and night he forgot how beautiful it was. She was so smooth and quiet and gentle, such a good housekeeper, that Jim often thought with disgust of her father's advice on the wedding day. The old man, bleary and bloated* with festival beer, elbowed Jim in the ribs and grinned suggestively,* so that his little dark eyes almost disappeared behind puffed and wrinkled lids.

`Don't be big fool, now,' he said. `Jelka is Slav girl. He's* not like American girl. If he is bad, beat him. If he's good too long, beat him too. I beat his mama. Papa beat my mama. Slav girl! lie's not like a man* that don't beat hell out of him.'

`I wouldn't beat Jelka,' Jim said.

The father giggled and nudged him again with his elbow, `Don't be big fool,' he warned. Sometime you see.' He rolled back to the beer barrel.

Jim found soon enough that Jelka was not like American girls. She was very quiet. She never spoke first, but only answered his questions, and then with soft short replies. She learned her husband as she learned passages of Scripture.* After they had been married a while, Jim never wanted for any habitual thing* in the house but Jelka had it ready for him before he could ask. She was a fine wife, but there was no companionship in her. She never talked. 1Ier great eyes followed him, and when he smiled, sometimes she smiled too, a distant and covered* smile. Her knitting and mending and sewing were interminable.* There she sat, watching her wise hands, and she seemed to regard with wonder and pride the little white hands that could do such nice and useful things. She was so much like an animal that sometimes Jim patted her head and neck under the same impulse that made him stroke a horse.

In the house Jelka was remarkable. No matter what time Jim carne in from the hot dry range* or from the bottom farm land, his dinner was exactly, steaming ready for him. She watched while he ate, and pushed the dishes close when he needed them, and filled his cup when it was empty.

Early in the marriage he told her things that happened on the farm, but she smiled at him as a foreigner does who wishes to be agreeable even though he doesn't understand.

`The stallion cut himself on the barbed wire,' he said.

And she replied `Yes,' with a downward inflection that had neither question nor interest.

He realized before long that he could not get in touch* with her in any way. lf she had a life apart,* it was so remote as to be beyond his reach. The barrier in her eyes was not one that could be removed, for it was neither hostile nor intentional.

At night he stroked her straight black hair and her unbelievably smooth golden shoulders, and she whimpered* a little with pleasure. Only in the climax of his embrace did she seem to have a life apart, fierce and passionate. And then immediately she lapsed into* the alert and painfully dutiful wife.

`Why don't you ever talk to me?' he demanded. `Don't you want to talk to me?'

`Yes,' she said. `What do you want me to say?' She spoke the language of his race out of a mind that was foreign to his race.

When a year had passed, Jim began to crave* the company of women, the chattery exchange of small talk, the shrill pleasant insults, the shame-sharpened vulgarity.* He began to go again to town, to drink and to play with the noisy girls of the Three Star. They liked him there for his firm, controlled face and for his readiness to laugh.

`Where's your wife?' they demanded.

`Home in the barn,' he responded. It was a never-failing joke.

Saturday afternoons he saddled a horse and put a rifle in the scabbard in case he should see a deer. Always he asked: `You don't mind staying alone?'

`No 1 don't mind.'

At once he asked: `Suppose someone should come?'

Her eyes sharpened for a moment, and then she smiled. `1 would send them away,' she said.

`VII be back about noon tomorrow. it’s too far to ride in the night.' He felt that she knew where he was going, but she never protested nor gave any sign of disapproval. `You should have a baby,' he said.

Her face lighted up. Some time God will be good,' she said eagerly.

He was sorry for her loneliness. if only she visited with the other women of the canyon she would be less lonely, but she had no gift for visiting. Once every month or so she put horses to the buckboard* and went to spend an afternoon with her mother, and with the brood of brothers and sisters and cousins who lived in her father's house.

`A fine time you'll have,' Jim said to her. `You'll gabble your crazy language like ducks for a whole afternoon. You'll giggle* with that big grown cousin of yours with the embarrassed face. If 1 could find any fault with you, 1'd call you a damn foreigner.' He remembered how she blessed the bread with the sign of the cross before she put it in the oven, how she knelt at the bedside every night, how she had a holy picture tacked* to the wall in the closet.

One Saturday in a hot dusty June, Jim cut oats in the farm flat*. The day was long. It was after six o'clock when the mower tumbled the last band* of oats. He drove the clanking machine up into the barnyard and backed it into the implement shed, and there he unhitched the horses and turned them out to graze on the hills over Sunday. When he entered the kitchen Jelka was just putting his dinner on the table. He washed his hands and face and sat down to eat.

`I'm tired,' he said, `but 1 think 1'11 go to Monterey anyway. There'll be a full moon.'

Her soft eyes smiled.

'I'll tell you what VII do,' he said. `If you would like to go, 1'll hitch up a rig* and take you with me.'

She smiled again and shook her head. `No, the stores would be closed. I would rather stay here.'

`Well, all right, VII saddle the horse then. I didn't think I was going. The stocks all turned out. Maybe I can catch a horse easy. Sure you don't want to go?'

`lf it was early, and 1 could go to the stores - but it will be ten o'clock when you get there.'

`Oh, no - well, anyway, on horseback VII make it a little after nine.'

Her mouth smiled to itself, but her eyes watched him for the development of a wish. Perhaps because he was tired from the long day's work, he demanded: `What are you thinking about?'

`Thinking about? I remember, you used to ask that nearly every day when we were first married.'

`But what are you?' he insisted irritably.

`Oh - I'm thinking about the eggs under the black hen.' She got up and went to the big calendar on the wall. `They will hatch tomorrow or maybe Monday.'

It was almost dusk* when he had finished shaving and putting on his blue serge suit and his new boots. Jelka had the dishes washed and put away. As Jim went through the kitchen he saw that she had taken the lame to the table near the window, and that she sat beside it knitting a brown wool sock.

`Why do you sit there tonight?' he asked. `You always sit over here. You do funny things sometimes.'

Her eyes arose slowly from her flying hands. `The moon,' she said quietly. `You said it would be full tonight. I want to see the moon rise.'

`But you're silly. You can't see it from that window. I thought you knew direction better than that.'

She smiled remotely. `I will look out of the bedroom window, then.'

Jim put on his black hat and went out. Walking through the dark empty barn, he took a halter* from the rack. On the grassy sidehill he whistled high and shrill. The horses stopped feeding and moved slowly in towards him, and stopped twenty feet away.

Carefully he approached his hay gelding* and moved his hand from its rump along its side and up and over its neck.* * The halterstrap clicked in its buckle. Jim turned and led the horse back to the barn. He threw his saddle on and cinched it tight, put his silver-bound bridle over the stiff ears, buckled the throat latch, knotted the tie-rope about the gelding's neck and fastened the neat coil-end to the saddle string. Then he slipped the halter and led the horse to the house. A radiant crown of soft red light lay over the eastern hills. The full moon would rise before the valley had completely lost the daylight.

In the kitchen Jelka still knitted by the window. Jim strode to the corner of the room and took up his 30-30 carbine.* As he rammed cartridges into the magazine,* he said: The moon glow is on the hills. If you are going to see it rise, you better go outside now. It's going to be a good red one at rising.'

`In a moment,' she replied, `when 1 come to the end here.' ¡le went to her and patted her sleek head.

`Good night. 1'11 probably be back by noon tomorrow.' 1Ier dusky black eyes followed him out of the door.

Jim thrust the rifle into his saddle-scabbard, and mounted and swung his horse down the canyon. On his right, from behind the blackening hills, the great red moon slid rapidly up. The double light of the day's last afterglow and the rising moon thickened the outlines of the trees and gave a mysterious new perspective to the hills. The dusty oaks shimmered* and glowed, and the shade under them was black as velvet. A huge, long-legged shadow of a horse and half a man rode to the left and slightly ahead of Jim. From the ranches near and distant carne the sound of dogs tuning up for a night of song. And the roosters crowed,* thinking a new dawn had come too quickly. Jim lifted the gelding to a trot. The spattering hoof-steps echoed back from the castle behind him. He thought of blonde May at the Three Star at Monterey. 'I'll be late. Maybe someone else'll have her,' he thought. The moon was clear of the hills now.

Jim had gone a mile when he heard the hoofbeats of a horse coming towards him. A horseman cantered up and pulled to a stop. `That you, Jim?'

`Yes. Oh, hello, George.'

`I was just riding up to your place. 1 want to tell you - you know the springboard* at the upper end of my land?'

`Yes, I know.'

`Well, 1 was up there this afternoon. 1 found a dead campfire and a calf's head and feet. The skin was in the fire, half burned, but I pulled it out and it had your brand.`

`The hell,' said Jim. `How old was the fire?'

`The ground was still warm in the ashes. Last night, I guess. Look, Jim, I can't go up with you. I've got to go to town, but I thought I'd tell you, so you could take a look around.'

Jim asked quietly: `Any idea how many men?'

`No. 1 didn't look close.'

`Well; 1 guess 1 better go up and look. 1 was going to town too. But if there are thieves working, 1 don't want to lose any more stock. 1'11 cut up through your land if you don't mind, George.'

`I'd go with you, but I've got to go to town. You got a gun with you?'

`Oh yes, sure. Here under my leg. Thanks for telling me.'

`That's all right. Cut through any place you want. Good night.' The neighbour turned his horse and cantered back in the direction from which he had come.

For a few moments Jim sat in the moonlight, looking down at his stilted* shadow. He pulled his rifle from its scabbard, levered a cartridge into the chamber, and held the gun across the pommel of his saddle. He turned left from the road, went up the little ridge, through the oak grove, over the grassy hogback* and down the other side into the next canyon.

In half an hour he had found the deserted camp. He turned over the heavy, leathery calf's head and felt its dusty tongue to judge by the dryness how long it had been dead. He

lighted a match and looked at his brand on the half-burned hide. At last he mounted his horse again, rode over the bald grassy hills and crossed into his own land.

A warm summer wind was blowing on the hilltops. The moon, as it quartered up the sky, lost its redness and turned the colour of strong tea. Among the hills the coyotes* were singing, and the dogs at the ranch houses below joined them with broken-hearted howling. The dark green oaks below and the yellow summer grass showed their colours in the moonlight.

Jim followed the sound of the cowbells to his herd, and found them eating quietly, and a few deer feeding with them. He listened for the sound of hoofbeats* or the voices of men on the wind.

It was after eleven when he turned his horse towards home. He rounded the west tower of the sandstone castle, rode through the shadow and out into the moonlight again. Below, the roofs of his barn and house shone dully. The bedroom window cast back a streak of reflection.

The feeding horses lifted their heads as Jim carne down through the pasture. Their eyes glinted redly when they turned their heads.

Jim had almost reached the corral fence - he heard a horse stamping in the barn. His hand jerked the gelding down. He listened. It carne again, the stamping from the barn. Jim lifted his rifle and dismounted silently. He turned his horse loose and crept towards the barn.

In the blackness he could hear the grinding of the horse's teeth as it chewed hay. He moved along the barn until he carne to the occupied stall. After a moment of listening he scratched a match on the butt of his rifle. A saddled and bridled horse was tied in the stall. The bit* was slipped under the chin and the cinch* loosened. The horse stopped eating and turned its head towards the light.

Jim blew out the match and walked quickly out of the barn. He sat on the edge of the horse-trough* and looked into the water. His thoughts came so slowly that he put them into words and said them under his breath.

Shall I look through the window? No. My head would throw a shadow in the room.'

He regarded the rifle in his hand. Where it had been rubbed and, handled, the black gun finish had worn off, leaving the metal silvery.

At last he stood up with decision and moved towards the house. At the steps, an extended foot tried each board tenderly before he put his weight on it. The three ranch dogs carne out from under the house and shook themselves, stretched and sniffed, wagged their tails and went back to bed.

The kitchen was dark, but Jim knew where every piece of furniture was. He put out his hand and touched the corner of the table, a chair back, the towel hanger, as he went along. He crossed the room so silently that even he could hear only his breath and the whisper of his trouserlegs together, and the beating of his watch in his pocket. The bedroom door stood open and spilled a patch of moonlight on the kitchen floor. Jim reached the door at last and peered* through.

The moonlight lay on the white bed. Jim saw Jelka lying on her back, one soft bare arm flung across her forehead and eyes. He could not see who the man was, for his head was turned away. Jim watched, holding his breath. Then Jelka twitched* in her sleep and the man rolled his head and sighed - Jelka's cousin, her grown, embarrassed cousin.

Jim turned and quickly stole back across the kitchen and down the back steps. He walked up the yard to the water-trough again, and sat down on the edge of it. The moon was white as chalk, and it swam in the water, and lighted the straws and barley dropped by the horses' mouths. Jim could see the mosquito wrigglers, tumbling up and down, end over end, in the water, and he could see a newt lying in the sun moss in the bottom of the trough.

He cried a few dry, hard, smothered sobs,* and wondered why, for his thought was of the grassed hilltops and of the lonely summer wind whisking along.

His thoughts turned to the way his mother used to hold a bucket to catch the throat blood when his father killed a pig. She stood as far away as possible and held the bucket at arms'-length to keep her clothes from getting spattered.

Jim dipped his hand into the trough and stirred the moon* to broken, swirling streams of light. He wetted his forehead with his damp hands and stood up. This time he did not move so quietly, but he crossed the kitchen on tiptoe and stood in the bedroom door. Jelka moved her arm and opened her eyes a little. Then the eyes sprang wide, then they glistened with moisture. Jim looked into her eyes; his face was empty of expression. A little drop ran out of Jelka’s nose and lodged in the hollow of her upper lip. She stared back at him.

Jim cocked* the rifle. The steel click sounded through the house. The man on the bed stirred uneasily in his sleep. Jim's hands were quivering. He raised the gun to his shoulder and held it tightly to keep from shaking. Over the sights he saw the little white square between the man's brows and hair. The front sight wavered a moment and then carne to rest.

The gun crash tore the air. Jim, still looking down the barrel, saw the whole bed jolt under the blow. A small, black, bloodless hole was in the man's forehead. But behind, the hollow-point took brain and bone and splashed them on the pillow.

Jelka's cousin gurgled* in his throat. 1Iis hands carne crawling out from under the covers like big white spiders, and they walked for a moment, then shuddered and fell quiet.

Jim looked slowly back at Jelka. Her nose was running. Her eyes had moved from him to the end of the rifle. She whined softly, like a cold puppy.

Jim turned in panic. His boot heels beat on the kitchen floor, but outside, he moved slowly towards the water-trough again. There was a taste of salt in his throat, and his heart heaved painfully. He pulled his hat off and dipped his head into the water. Then he leaned over and vomited on the ground. In the house he could hear Jelka moving about. She whimpered like a puppy. Jim straightened up, weak and dizzy.

He walked tiredly through the corral and into the pasture. His saddled horse carne at his whistle. Automatically he tightened the cinch, mounted and rode away, down the road to the valley. The squat black shadow travelled under him. The moon sailed high and white. The uneasy dogs barked monotonously.

At daybreak a buckboard and pair* trotted up to the ranch yard, scattering the chickens. A deputy sheriff* and a coroner* sat in the seat. Jim Moore half reclined against his saddle in the wagon-box. His tired gelding followed behind. The deputy sheriff set the brake and wrapped the lines around it. The men dismounted.

Jim asked: `Do 1 have to go in? 1'm too tired and wrought up* to see it now.'

The coroner pulled his lip and studied. `Oh, 1 guess not. We'll tend to* things and look around.'

Jim sauntered away* towards the water-trough. `Say,' he called, `kind of clean up a little, will you? You know.'

The men went on into the house.

In a few minutes they emerged, carrying the stiffened body between them. It was wrapped in a comforter.* They eased it up into the wagon-box. Jim walked back towards them. `Do 1 have to go in with you now?'

`Where's your wife, Mr Moore?' the deputy sheriff demanded.

`I don't know,' he said wearily. `She's somewhere around.'

`You're sure you didn't kill her too?'

`No. I didn't touch her. I'll find her and bring her in this afternoon. That is, if you don't want me to go in with you now.'

`We've got your statement,'* the coroner said. `And by God, we've got eyes, haven't we, Will? Of course there's a technical charge of murder against you, but it'll be dismissed.* Always is in this part of the country. Go kind of light on your wife, Mr Moore.'

`I won't hurt her,' said Jim.

He stood and watched the buckboard jolt away. 13e kicked his feet reluctantly* in the dust. The hot June sun showed its face over the hills and flashed viciously on the bedroom window.

Jim went slowly into the house, and brought out a nine-foot, loaded bull whip. He crossed the yard and walked into the barn. And as he climbed the ladder to the hay-loft, he heard the high, puppy whimpering start.

When Jim came out of the barn again, he carried Jelka over his shoulder. By the water-trough he set her tenderly on the ground. Her hair was littered with bits of hay. The back of her shirtwaist was streaked with blood.

Jim wetted his bandana* at the pipe and washed her bitten lips, and washed her face and brushed back her hair. Her dusty black eyes followed every move he made.

`You hurt me,' she said. `You hurt me bad.'

He nodded gravely. `Bad as I could without killing you.'

The sun shone hotly on the ground. A few blowflies buzzed about, looking for the blood.

Jelka's thickened lips tried to smile. `Did you have any breakfast at all?'

`No,' he said. `None at all.'

`Well, then, I'll fry you up some eggs.' She struggled painfully to her feet.

`Let me help you,' he said. `I'll help you get your shirtwaist off. It's drying stuck to your back. It'll hurt.'

`No. I'll do it myself.' Her voice had a peculiar resonance* in it. Her dark eyes dwelt warmly on him for a moment, and then she turned and limped into the house.

Jim waited, sitting on the edge of the water-trough. He saw the smoke start out of the chimney and sail straight up into the air. In a few moments Jelka called him from the kitchen door.

`Come, Jim. Your breakfast.'

Four fried eggs and four thick slices of bacon lay on a warmed plate for him. `The coffee will be ready in a minute,' she said.

`Won't you eat?'

`No. Not now. My mouth's too sore.'

He ate his eggs hungrily and then looked up at her. Her black hair was combed smooth. She had on a fresh white shirtwaist. `We're going to town this afternoon,' he said. Tm going to order lumber.* We'll build a new house farther down the canyon.'

Her eyes darted to the closed bedroom door and then back to him. `Yes,' she said. `That will be good.' And then, after a moment, `will you whip me any more - for this?'

`No, not any more, for this.'

Her eyes smiled. She sat down on a chair beside him, and Jim put out his hand and stroked her hair and the back of her neck.

Glossary

The meanings given below are those which the words and phrases have as they occur in the story.

Page

85 range: line of mountains.

85 spurs and ridges: particular areas of mountainous ground with valleys between.

85 arroyos: (Spanish) narrow valleys cut by streams.

85 canyons: deep, narrow valleys with steep, high sides.

85 buttressed: a buttress is a stone structure built against a wall to make it stronger.

85 Crusaders: European soldiers of the Medieval period who invaded and occupied parts of the Middle East.

85 strange accident . . . sandstone: the stone of the mountain had been worn away over the centuries so that it looked exactly like a real castle.

85 ranch: cattle farm.

85 warped: twisted out of its original shape.

85 defying: showing they are not afraid of.

85 No Trespassing: you may not walk en this land; it is private property.

85 morbid: interested in dark things and especially death.

85 forbids: does not allow.

85 plump: slightly fat in an attractive way.

85 awe: feeling of great respect because of his power.

86 manger-rack: place for animal food.

86 his majority: becoming 21 and so a full adult.

86 doe: a female deer.

86 startled: surprised.

86 bleary and bloated: the beer had made his eyes dull and his face unusually fat-looking.

86 suggestively: in a way that showed that he meant something he had not spoken about.

86 He: the father's English is not very good.

86 He's not like a man: Le., She won't like a man . . .

86 passages of Scripture: parts of the Bible.

86 never wanted for any habitual thing: never had to wait or ask for anything.

86 covered: as if hiding something.

87 interminable: endless.

87 range: the land on which the cattle were kept.

87 get in touch: communicate.

87 life apart: a separate, individual life.

87 whimpered: made small, quiet crying noises.

87 lapsed into: went back again to being.

87 crave: want very much, long for.

87 shame-sharpened vulgarity: rough talk, especially about sex, which he enjoyed more because he felt it was wrong for him as a married man.

88 put . . . buckboard: attached the horses to the cart.

88 giggle: laugh in a silly way.

88 holy picture tacked: religious picture nailed.

88 flat: field.

88 mower tumbled the last band: cutter cut the last area.

89 hitch up a rig: attach horses to a kind of small cart.

89 dusk: the time of half darkness between day and night.

89 halter: leather strap for the horse's head.

90 bay gelding: reddish-brown horse.

90 * * : the following lines (11. 2-8) describe how he caught the horse and fitted the bridle (leather head straps) and saddle (seat) to the horse. The details are not important.

90 carbine: a kind of gun.

90 rammed . . . magazine: pushed bullets into the gun.

90 shimmered: shone gently with light.

90 roosters crowed: cockerels (male chickens) called out.

91 springboard: high place where a small stream begins.

91 brand: mark of ownership made on skin with hot metal.

91 stilted: shortened (the moon is now higher in the sky).

91 bogback: smooth, rounded hill.

91 coyotes: a coyote is a kind of wolf.

92 boofbeats: sound of horses' feet.

92 bit: metal part of a bridle which goes into the mouth.

92 cinch: leather strap attaching the saddle to the horse.

92 horse-trough: container for animals to drink from.

93 peered: looked hard.

93 twitched: suddenly moved a little.

93 smothered sobs: sounds of crying he tries to control and hide.

93 stirred the moon: broke up the reflection of the moon.

94 cocked: prepared for firing.

94 gurgled: the noise of air passing through liquid in a narrow place.

94 buckboard and pair: kind of cart with two horses.

94 sheriff: officer of the law; a kind of policeman.

94 coroner: official who decides the legal cause of sudden or unexpected deaths.

94 wrought up: nervous and upset.

94 tend to: look after.

95 sauntered away: walked off in a casual, relaxed way.

95 comforter: bed cover.

95 statement: written account of what happened.

95 dismissed: cancelled.

95 reluctantly: in an unwilling way.

95 bandana: neck-cloth.

96 resonance: rich, full sound.

96 lumber: logs of wood for building.

Questions

1. If the story didn't have a title, what clues are there in the first page which would make you expect it to be about something strange and dark?

(a) Is the countryside pleasant and friendly, or dramatic and a bit frightening? (p. 85)

(b) What is the condition of the group of buildings below the `castle'? (p. 85)

(c) What is Jim's attitude to his property? Does the house matter very much to him? (p. 85)

(d) How do people regard Jim? (p. 85)

(e) Who goes with him to town? (p. 85)

2. Why does Jim marry Jelka? (p. 86)

(a) Did he want to marry someone of a nationality different from his own?

(b) Was he a close friend of her family?

(c) What was Jelka like physically?

3. What kind of relationship do Jim and Jelka have?

(a) Does he take her father's advice seriously? (p. 86)

(b) Is Jelka a good housekeeper? (p. 86)

(c) Do she and Jim talk a lot and is she good company for him? (pp. 86-87)

(d) What does Jelka remind Jim of and why? (p. 87)

(e) Is their physical relationship really satisfying for them both? (p. 87)

4. What changes take place after the first few months of the marriage? (pp. 87-88)

(a) Is Jim content with Jelka's company? (p. 87)

(b) What old habit does Jim start again? (p. 87)

(c) Has Jelka made friends in the neighbourhood? Who does she visit and how often? (p. 88)

(d) Is Jim satisfied with Jelka's way of life?

(e) Is Jelka moving towards Jim's outlook and way of life?

(f) What does Jim want to know and how does Jelka answer him? (p. 88)

5. What is the situation on the Saturday night?

(a) Where does Jim decide to go and when does he say he will return? (p. 88, p. 90)

(b) At first, does he wish to be alone? (p. 89)

(c) What does Jelka say she will do? (p. 89)

(d) Why does Jim never get to Monterey? Who does he meet on the road and what is he told? (pp. 90-91)

6. How does Jim feel and act when he gets home?

(a) What makes him suspicious? (p. 92)

(b) When does he realize what is going on? Has he been at all suspicious before? (p. 92)

(c) Does he shoot the other man in anger as soon as he sees him? (p. 93)

(d) How does he feel when he goes out again and Bits on the water-trough? (p. 93)

(e) What does he do in the time after he has shot Jelka's cousin? (p. 94)

(f) What does he decide to do to Jelka and what effect does this have? (pp. 95-96)

7. What picture of their marriage do we get from the story?

(a) What does Jim do whenever he spends the night in Monterey and does he appear to think his way of life is unfair to Jelka? (p. 87, p. 88)

(b) How, in general, does he treat her?

(c) Does Jelka mind when Jim goes away? How does she react when he suggests that someone might come while he is away? (p. 88)

(d) When he sets off for Monterey, where does Jelka decide to sit? What reason does she give? Is it convincing? What is the real reason? (p. 89)

(e) Does Jelka accept the death of her cousin quietly? (pp. 94-96)

(f) What does she offer to do after Jim has beaten her and what is the meaning of this exchange?

`Will you whip me any more - for this?'

`No, not any more, for this.' (p. 96)

8. What differences are there in the ways Jim and Jelka think about unfaithfulness?

(a) Does Jelka know where Jim goes at nights? (p. 88)

(b) Does she seem to mind?

(c) Does Jim suspect Jelka of being unfaithful to him?

(d) What does he do when he discovers the truth?

9. What do you think?

In the first year of their marriage Jim was gentle to Jelka and each was unfaithful to the other. After he had murdered her lover and beaten her, she presumably remained faithful and the marriage appears to have been successful (p. 85). Which of the following do you agree or disagree with and why?

(a) If you marry a foreigner, you must treat him/her in a foreign way.

(b) Jim was a bully.

(c) Jim was forced to act as he did and the results were good.

(d) Jelka is an unfortunate victim of her own culture, which taught her to expect violence from men as the right thing.

(e) Jim was right to beat Jelka.

(f) Jim should have gone on being gentle to Jelka.

(g) It was all Jelka’s fault for sleeping with her cousin.

(h) It was all Jim’s fault for not staying at home.

(i) The coroner and the sheriff were right to think as they did about the murder.

(j) Jim and Jelka's marriage turned out to be a good one.

(k) They should never have got married in the first place.

10. In many societies an unfaithful wife is, or has been, thought much worse and punished much more than an unfaithful husband. What does this show about such societies and what do you think about it?