

Little Things

Raymond Carver

Early that day the weather turned and the snow was melting into dirty water. Streaks of it ran down from the little shoulder-high window that faced the backyard. Cars slushed by on the street outside, where it was getting dark. But it was getting dark on the inside too.

He was in the bedroom pushing clothes into a suitcase when she came to the door.

I'm glad you're leaving! I'm glad you're leaving! she said. Do you hear?

He kept on putting his things into the suitcase.

Son of a bitch! I'm so glad you're leaving! She began to cry. You can't even look me in the face, can you?

Then she noticed the baby's picture on the bed and picked it up.

He looked at her and she wiped her eyes and stared at him before turning and going back to the living room.

Bring that back, he said.

Just get your things and get out, she said.

He did not answer. He fastened the suitcase, put on his coat, looked around the bedroom before turning off the light. Then he went out to the living room.

She stood in the doorway of the little kitchen, holding the baby.

I want the baby, he said.

Are you crazy?

No, but I want the baby. I'll get someone to come by for his things.

You're not touching this baby, she said.

The baby had begun to cry and she uncovered the blanket from around his head.

Oh, oh, she said, looking at the baby.

He moved toward her.

For God's sake! she said. She took a step back into the kitchen.

I want the baby.

Get out of here!

She turned and tried to hold the baby over in a corner behind the stove.

But he came up. He reached across the stove and tightened his hands on the baby.

Let go of him, he said.

Get away, get away! she cried.

The baby was red-faced and screaming. In the scuffle they knocked down a flowerpot that hung behind the stove.

He crowded her into the wall then, trying to break her grip. He held on to the baby and pushed with all his weight.

Let go of him, he said.

Don't, she said. You're hurting the baby, she said.

I'm not hurting the baby, he said.

The kitchen window gave no light. In the near-dark he worked on her fisted fingers with one hand and with the other hand he gripped the screaming baby up under an arm near the shoulder.

She felt her fingers being forced open. She felt the baby going from her.

No! she screamed just as her hands came loose.

She would have it, this baby. She grabbed for the baby's other arm.

She caught the baby around the wrist and leaned back.

But he would not let go. He felt the baby slipping out of his hands and he pulled back very hard.

In this manner, the issue was decided.

Examining "Little Things"

Use the following multiple choice questions to examine Raymond Carver's "Little Things." For each, decide which response you think is best; note your reasoning in the space provided.

- _____ 1. The man and woman are best described as
- A. vicious and violent
 - B. sentimental and loving
 - C. angry and frustrated
 - D. apathetic and bored
 - E. greedy and calculating
- _____ 2. The story's imagery emphasizes
- A. light and dark
 - B. household odors
 - C. winter weather
 - D. flowers and plants
 - E. alcohol and cigarettes
- _____ 3. The language is best described as
- A. formal and erudite
 - B. journalistic
 - C. substandard and slang
 - D. scientific
 - E. simple and colloquial
- _____ 4. The last sentence in the first paragraph implies
- A. the family's poverty
 - B. the season and time of day
 - C. the characters' states of mind
 - D. the characters' inertia
 - E. the events preceding the narrative
- _____ 5. The social setting appears to be
- A. wealthy suburbia
 - B. upper middle class
 - C. lower middle class
 - D. rural poverty
 - E. urban homeless
- _____ 6. The point of view
- A. is omniscient throughout
 - B. is first-person throughout
 - C. is objective throughout
 - D. shifts between objective and omniscient
 - E. is limited omniscient throughout
- _____ 7. The story is one of
- A. graphic violence
 - B. domestic tranquillity
 - C. understated violence
 - D. unredeemed guilt
 - E. moral reawakening
- _____ 8. In the concluding sentence, the word "issue"
- A. signifies the subject of the argument
 - B. refers to the baby
 - C. states the result of the dispute
 - D. has no meaning
 - E. has multiple meanings