



Simply Suspense

Frank Stockton, Stacey Aumonier and Alfred Burrage



About the authors

Frank Stockton was born in 1834 in Philadelphia in the USA into a literary family. He wrote fairy stories from a young age. He followed different careers when he grew up, first as a wood engraver and then as a teacher. He finally turned to writing when he had a story published in his mid-thirties. *The Lady or the Tiger?* was his most famous work and has remained so. Stockton was flooded with letters requesting the solution to the puzzle, but he cleverly realised that the success of the story depended on the solution remaining a mystery. And, who knows, perhaps there never was an answer.

Stacey Aumonier was born in England in 1887. He wrote many short stories. *Miss Bracegirdle's Night of Fear* is about Englishness and how English people of a certain class cope with unexpected events. Aumonier died very young at the age of 41 in 1928. He is little known today.

Alfred McLelland Burrage was born in Middlesex, England in 1889. His father and uncle were both successful authors, and Alfred also started his writing career at a young age. He published his first story *Footprints* in 1912.

He lived in London for many years and was a prolific writer of short stories – many of them ghost stories – for magazines. During the First World War he served as a private in the Artists Rifles (28th Battalion, London Regiment). He was evacuated in April 1918 due to trench foot. Some years later he went on to write about his war experiences under the pseudonym of Ex-Private X. *War is War* was published in 1930. *The Waxwork* was published in 1931, also under the name of Ex-Private X. It was very popular in America and is a great example of the suspense genre.

Summary

The Lady or the Tiger?

Many years ago in a far off country there was a king with one problem: how to stop crime in his kingdom. One day he thinks of a plan. He builds a huge stadium and invites his people there. At one end of the stadium there are two doors. Each week a wrongdoer is brought to the stadium and has to choose a door. Behind one of the doors there is a tiger and certain death for the wrongdoer. Behind the other door is a beautiful woman and a happy future for the wrongdoer. The King's plan works and there are fewer and fewer crimes. And then one day he finds his daughter in the arms of the gardener. The King is furious and has the gardener arrested and taken to the stadium. His daughter finds out which door will have the tiger and which door will hide the beautiful woman. She can help her lover, but what will she choose to do?

Miss Bracegirdle's Night of Fear

The story is about an innocent abroad. A quiet Englishwoman, unmarried and middle-aged, finds herself in a small hotel in south-west France. After taking a nice hot bath, she goes into the wrong hotel bedroom and gets locked in. She realises there is no escape from the room. At that moment, she sees a man lying in the bed asleep. She does not know how to behave in a situation like this. She becomes very worried. If she wakes the man, people will know she has been in a room with a strange man. What will people think of her? What will the man do to her? She decides to hide under the bed until morning. She lies quietly under the bed thinking about these questions, when suddenly she sneezes. The man does not wake up, and she doesn't understand. She cannot stand the tension any longer and she jumps up and puts the light on, only to find that the man is dead. She manages to keep her cool and to find a way of opening the door. She goes back to her room and sleeps.

The Waxwork

A young reporter writes stories for newspapers. He has an idea for a story. He arranges to spend the night in the murderers' room at a waxworks museum. The piece will be called *A Night with Marriner's Murderers*. The murderers in question are only waxwork figures, but he is sure that he will be able to sell the story to the newspaper.

The owner of the museum offers him five pounds if his story is published in the newspaper. He takes the young reporter to the Murderers' Room, which is big and dark. All the waxworks are of dead murderers, except one; and



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that one is of Dr Bourdette. The police think that Dr Bourdette is dead, but they have never found the body. He worked as a doctor by day and he cut people's throats by night. And recently there have been two more murders that look just like his work.

The young man settles down for the night, but he finds it very difficult to stay calm. 'They're only waxworks,' he tells himself. But he begins to imagine that the figures are moving. He begins to hallucinate, imagining that the wax figures are coming to life; one of them is talking to him.

Background and themes

A good suspense story is full of unexpected moments, and each new twist and turn in the story will make the reader jump with fear or surprise. Famous suspense writers include Bram Stoker (*Dracula*) and Edgar Allan Poe (*The Black Cat and Other Stories* – Penguin readers Level 3).

The great twentieth century master of suspense was the film director Alfred Hitchcock. Towards the end of his career, he presented a series of television films based on stories of suspense. One of these films was an adaptation of Burrage's *The Waxwork*.

The Lady or the Tiger? has the timeless quality of *The Tales of the Arabian Nights*. It is set in an ancient civilization in an unidentified land, many centuries ago. The story presents a puzzle and leaves the reader to find a solution. Many people suggested answers when it was first published. Robert Browning wrote a poem about it and Hindu scholars studied it carefully.

Miss Bracegirdle's Night of Fear is set in the early years of the twentieth century in France. It is about an unmarried English woman of about forty who has lived a very quiet, sheltered life in a small country town somewhere in the south of England. She lives with her brother, who is also unmarried and who fusses over her. Their sister, Annie, is clearly the exotic member of the family – she left many years before to go and live in South America.

Miss Bracegirdle's story takes place before the days of air travel, when travelling from the south of England to the south of France was quite an adventure. When the frightening events of the story begin to take over, Miss Bracegirdle doesn't know what to do. She has never been in a situation like this before and she has no code of behaviour to follow. When it is all over, she is very pleased with how she has coped. She will enjoy thinking about her adventure when she is back at home and will feel that she is a little more exotic than she seems.

The Waxwork is set in a small English town, perhaps a seaside town where English people come on holiday. Marriner's Waxworks is probably a rather dusty old-fashioned museum with very few up-to-date exhibits. It is nothing like Madam Tussaud's in London, which is the most famous British waxworks museum and which is mentioned in the story.

The story is about the terrible power of the imagination. It describes a build-up of fear in the mind which eventually leads the sufferer to hallucinate. The reporter becomes so frightened that he loses his power of reasoning and imagines the waxworks are coming to life. He literally dies of fright.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Discuss:** Ask the students to look up the word 'suspense' in their dictionaries. Then introduce the class to the idea of suspense in books and films – stories where you do not know what is going to happen until the last minute. Ask the students to think of some suspense stories that they know and to write down the titles. Now put the students into small groups and tell them to talk about the following questions: *How do you feel when you are watching or reading a story with suspense? How do writers or filmmakers create suspense?* Conduct a feedback session with the whole class.

The Lady or the Tiger?, pages 1–9

After reading

- Role play:** Ask the students to think about how they would feel if they were in the place of the beautiful young woman behind the door. Do they think anybody would volunteer to do it? Put the students into pairs. Tell them to prepare a role play. One student (A) plays one of the King's servants; the other student (B) plays a beautiful woman. Student A must convince Student B to agree to being placed behind the door. Remind them that if the wrongdoer chooses her door, she must marry him immediately. After a few minutes, have each pair act out the conversation in front of the whole class.
- Discuss:** Write up the following sentences on the board. *In the story, it is assumed that all the wrongdoers will be men. Is this fair?* Put the students into small groups and have them discuss this question.
- Write:** Have the students predict what is going to happen at the end. Put them into groups of three and tell them to imagine a final paragraph for the story. Tell them to think about the following questions: *Can the gardener get away? Will he live and be happy with the woman behind the door? Will the princess be happy if he lives and marries another woman?* When they



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have finished, have the groups read out their paragraphs to the rest of the class. The students vote on the best one.

- 5 **Discuss:** Ask the students to give their opinions on the following characters: the King, the King's daughter, the gardener. *Are they good or bad?*

Miss Bracegirdle's Night of Fear

Before reading

- 6 **Pair work:** Put the students into pairs. Ask them to look at the picture on page 11. Tell the students to compare the two women in the picture. Give them five minutes to write as many sentences as they can to describe the similarities and the differences. At the end of the five minutes, conduct a feedback session with the whole class to find out which pair has found the most similarities and differences.

Pages 10–13

After reading

- 7 **Role play:** In pairs, students write out the dialogue between Miss Bracegirdle and the maid on page 10 as if it were a stage play. Then each pair performs the dialogue until they can do it without reading the text.
- 8 **Pair work:** Ask the students to think of a place they have been in another country. If they have never travelled to another country, tell them to imagine that they have. Then tell the students to remember all the details of the journey – like Miss Bracegirdle does on page 10. Put the students into pairs and tell them to describe the details of their journey to their partner.
- 9 **Guess:** Write the following questions on the board: *How does Miss Bracegirdle feel at the end of page 13? Who do you think the man in the bed is? What will happen if he wakes up?* Ask the class to make some suggestions and write some of them up on the board. After a few minutes, put the students into small groups and ask them to imagine what Miss Bracegirdle is going to do next.

Pages 14–23

After reading

- 10 **Check:** Check whether the predictions made in exercise 9 were correct.
- 11 **Write:** Tell the students to read the letter that Miss Bracegirdle writes to her brother on pages 21–22. Ask them the following question: *Why doesn't Miss Bracegirdle tell her brother the truth?* Then tell them to imagine that she decides to write another letter to him. This time she wants to impress him and make him see how exciting and dangerous her trip to France was. Get the students to exchange letters with another student. Each student tries to correct the grammar and spelling in their partner's work.
- 12 **Role play:** Ask the students the following question: *Do you think Miss Bracegirdle will tell her sister about her 'night of fear' Why/why not?* Now tell them to work

in pairs and to imagine the conversation between the two sisters after they meet in Bordeaux. Ask some of the pairs to perform their dialogue in front of the whole class.

The Waxwork

Before reading

- 13 **Discuss:** Write the word 'waxwork' on the board. Make sure they understand it. Ask the students if they have ever been to a waxworks museum. Ask them to if they enjoyed the museum and why (if they have already been) or if they would like to go, and why (if they have never been). Put the students into groups of three or four and tell them to share their opinions.

Pages 24–30

After reading

- 14 **Role play:** Ask students to look at the picture on page 25 of Mr Marriner and Raymond Hewson discussing Hewson's plan to spend the night inside the museum. Working in pairs, they describe the characters and say what they are talking about. Then ask the students to write out the dialogue between the two characters and to practise it in pairs. Ask some of the pairs to act out the dialogue in front of the whole class.
- 15 **Read carefully:** Have individual students read out loud from page 28 'Marriner showed Hewson the more interesting murderers ...' to page 30 'Now come back to my office and have a strong drink before starting the night's work'. Choose one student to read the first sentence, and then choose another to read the second sentence, and so on. Work on pronunciation and intonation. Repeat the whole sequence two or three times.

Pages 30–39

After reading

- 16 **Role play:** Put students into small groups. Explain that they are going to open a waxworks museum. Each group decides how to organise their museum in terms of its themes (jobs, professions) and periods of history (ancient, recent). Then the groups choose five or six waxworks to put in the rooms. Finally, each group presents its project to the rest of the class.

After reading

- 17 **Discuss:** Put the students into small groups and ask them to imagine that one of the stories is to be made into a feature film. They must decide which story would make the most successful film. They must decide who will direct the film, and who will be the actors. Each group presents its project to the whole class.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.