A Little Cloud

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JAMES JOYCE

A key voice in Modernist writing, James Joyce stretched the boundaries of subject matter and style in his novels and short stories, leaving a lasting impact on fiction writing. Born and raised in Dublin, Ireland, Joyce attended Jesuit schools and later graduated from University College Dublin despite his family's poverty. Joyce was raised in the Catholic Church but he lost his religious faith early in life—a factor in his later work's criticism of strict religious piety and hypocrisy. In 1904 he met his life companion, Nora Barnacle, whom he lived with for many years before marrying in 1931. In 1904 the couple emigrated to continental Europe and lived the rest of their lives there, only returning to Ireland for brief visits. Before achieving success as a fiction writer, Joyce worked as an English teacher in Italy, Switzerland, and Paris. During this time, Joyce wrote *Dubliners* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and finished his major work *Ulysses*. This groundbreaking novel was patterned on Homer's *Odyssey* and garnered Joyce fame and notoriety due to its frank subject matter, stream-of-consciousness style, shifts in points of view, and non-chronological narration. Joyce's poor eyesight forced him to wear an eyepatch and later in life to undergo nine operations to repair his vision. In 1941, after surgery for an ulcer, Joyce died at 58.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Since the 16th century, Ireland had been gradually colonized by England. Following Ireland's incorporation into the United Kingdom in 1800, nationalist sentiment grew. Conflicts such as tension between English landlords and Irish tenants and religious divisions between Protestant and Catholic fueled agitation for Irish independence. By the early 20th century, when *Dubliners* was written, these tensions had reached a fever pitch. Political conflict resulted in a rebellion in the 1910s, leading to creation of the Irish Free State in 1922. By realistically and sympathetically portraying the ordinary experiences of average Dubliners in the eponymous short-story collection, Joyce reflects the contemporary interest in Irish nationalism. The discontent shown by his characters represents the more general political unrest of Ireland as a whole. In "A Little Cloud," for example, Little Chandler yearns to escape the confines of his dead-end life in Dublin but he lacks the ability to follow through on his dreams and he is ultimately left feeling trapped and alone. *Dubliners* also displays traits of Modernism, the literary movement that emerged in the early to mid-20th century. Modernist writers employed thematic and stylistic innovations that captured the disconnection and unrest of the modern age. For example, "A Little Cloud" uses an invisible narrator who recedes into the background, allowing the characters' thoughts and feelings to come through more directly. This technique contrasts with the intrusive narrator popular in 19th-century fiction who routinely comments on the story, sometimes practically functioning like a character themselves.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

"A Little Cloud" is eighth of the 15 short stories that comprise *Dubliners*. This collection realistically portrays the lives of everyday people in Dublin in the early 1900s. Through their stories, Joyce criticizes social conventions and raises complex moral questions, often by portraying characters struggling to come to terms with their limited, even thwarted lives. For example, in the last story of *Dubliners*, "The Dead," Joyce portrays a Christmas party that at first appears festive, but he also subtly shows that the guests are hiding private discontent and even tragedy. At the very end of the story, the main character has the devastating realization that his marriage has been a sham—much like the epiphany Little Chandler has at the end of "A Little Cloud" about being trapped in his ordinary life. Many other Modernist works similarly portray themes of identity, stagnation, and unfulfilled dreams. For example, Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* follows a day in the life of a wealthy socialite planning a party. On this day, she meets a number of people who prompt her to question her entire life's meaning and purpose. Similarly, Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* shows the main character reflecting on his failed efforts to achieve the American dream. Postmodern writers such as Samuel Beckett and John Gardner push the theme of questioning and searching for personal meaning even further by portraying characters' lives as absurd and random. Joyce's early works employed a conventional writing style in his early works (*Dubliners* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) but he also at times used the shifting points of view that featured heavily in his later novels *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** A Little Cloud
- **When Written:** 1906
- **Where Written:** Trieste, Italy
- **When Published:** 1914
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Short Story
- **Setting:** Dublin, Ireland

- **Climax:** At the story's conclusion, Little Chandler realizes that he is trapped by his life.
- **Antagonist:** Ignatius Gallaher
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Bottoms Up. Joyce's character Gallaher is a heavy drinker who, before achieving financial success in London, frequently took loans from friends. Like him, Joyce was a drinker—after emigrating, he and his partner, Nora, sometimes had to borrow money to get by. In fact, a substantial loan from a prominent arts patron, Harriet Shaw Weaver, allowed Joyce to finish writing *Ulysses*.

Poetic Ambitions. Though mostly known for his fiction, Joyce did write some poetry. In one early poem, "The Holy Office," he positioned his work as part of the Celtic Revival, an artistic movement that sought to represent Irish culture. In "A Little Cloud," Chandler dreams of making his mark in this trend of poetry celebrating Irish nationalism.

PLOT SUMMARY

"A **Little Cloud**" describes a day in the life of Thomas Chandler, nicknamed "Little Chandler" due to his below-average height and delicate, childlike appearance. On this day, Little Chandler excitedly awaits a meeting with his old friend Ignatius Gallaher. Gallaher left Dublin eight years prior, having immigrated to London to advance his career as a journalist. Now, back in Dublin for a visit, Gallaher has invited Little Chandler to meet with him. As Little Chandler sits at his desk doing his tiresome work as a legal clerk, he stares out the window and ponders Gallaher's life as "a brilliant figure on the London Press." These thoughts sadden Little Chandler, reminding him of his own relative lack of achievement. Little Chandler aspires to be a poet and owns a collection of poetry books, but he is too timid to even read the books to his wife.

At the appointed time, Little Chandler leaves his office to meet Gallaher at a restaurant called Corless's. As he walks to the restaurant, he begins to feel more empowered and hopeful. Little Chandler pictures the restaurant, a high-end establishment patronized by fashionable, wealthy people. He also remembers Gallaher in the old days—his friend was a heavy drinker and bad with money, yet nevertheless undeniably talented and admired by everyone. These thoughts of the restaurant and of his impressive old friend lead Little Chandler to feel a new sense of self-worth: "For the first time in his life he felt himself superior" to his fellow Dubliners. He then casts a critical eye on the city, noticing the shabby buildings and people. This feeling of empowerment reignites Little Chandler's dream of being a poet and escaping from "his own sober inartistic life." He reflects that at 32, he is not too old for a new career. Moreover, he considers that he has the right temperament to be a poet. Little Chandler pictures Gallaher helping him get published in a London paper, and imagines being recognized by English critics as part of the "Celtic school" of new Irish poets. In his mind, he even invents words of praise for his future poems and imagines changing his name to the more Irish-sounding "T. Malone Chandler." He becomes so lost in his dreams that he misses his turn and has to backtrack to the restaurant.

When Little Chandler arrives at Corless's, Gallaher greets him warmly as "Tommy" and orders them both malt whiskey. Gallaher appears prematurely aged and balding, with an "unhealthy pallor." He attributes his appearance to the stresses of life as a journalist and complains about its fast pace. The two men catch up on news about their old friends, and then the conversation turns to Gallaher's travels throughout Europe. Little Chandler has not traveled widely, and he inquires in particular about Paris, wondering if it is as "beautiful" and "immoral" as he has heard. Gallaher praises the Moulin Rouge, Parisian prostitutes, and the city's nightlife, commenting that "everything in Paris is gay." He continues sharing various pieces of racy gossip from his travels. Little Chandler feels "somewhat disillusioned" by Gallaher, observing a "vulgar" and "gaudy" manner about him.

The conversation turns to Little Chandler's life in the past eight years. Little Chandler tells Gallaher about his wife and their infant son, and invites Gallaher to spend the evening with his family. Gallaher declines the invitation because he is returning to London the next day, saying that perhaps he will visit again in a year. At this point, the two men have had several drinks—typical for Gallaher, but not for Little Chandler, who feels "warm and excited." Talking and drinking with Gallaher stirs up Little Chandler's feelings of inferiority and jealousy, and he grows resentful of Gallaher's success. Little Chandler reflects that his old friend is "his inferior in birth and education." Little Chandler bitterly thinks that were he given a chance, he could do something "higher than mere tawdry journalism." Saying goodbye over their last drink, Little Chandler jokes that Gallaher might be married next time they meet. Gallaher dismisses the possibility, saying that he wants to continue his "fling" and "see a bit of life and the world" first. When he does marry, he says, it will be for money—he will choose from among the "thousands of rich Germans and Jews" he's encountered in Europe. As they finish their drinks, Gallaher callously comments that being tied to one woman for life "must get a bit stale."

Little Chandler then returns home to his wife, Annie, who is in a foul mood not only because Little Chandler is late for tea, but also because he forgot to bring her a parcel of coffee. She goes out to get tea and sugar, giving Little Chandler their baby and cautioning him not to wake the sleeping child. Left alone with

the infant and his own thoughts, Little Chandler reflects on his wife. Little Chandler looks at a photo of Annie and thinks about her personality with disappointment. She seems to him cold and petty, with "no passion" and "no rapture." Instead, Little Chandler fantasizes about Gallaher's "rich Jewesses" and their "dark Oriental eyes." He even feels dissatisfied with the furniture in their home, finding it "prim and pretty." His thoughts grow resentful as he ponders escaping "his little house" to live "bravely like Gallaher" and become a poet in London.

Little Chandler tries to read a book of Lord Byron's poetry but is interrupted when the child awakes and starts crying. Unable to read, Little Chandler grows frustrated, thinking that he is a "prisoner for life." In his frustration, he yells "Stop!" in the baby's face. This action only upsets the infant more—he begins sobbing harder, to the point that Little Chandler fears the baby will die. At this point, Annie comes home. Seeing the baby's distress, she angrily asks Little Chandler, "What have you done to him?" She takes their son and comforts him, and while the baby stops crying, "tears of remorse" well up in Little Chandler's eyes.

CHARACTERS

Thomas Chandler / Little Chandler – Thomas Chandler is the main character of the story. He is Annie's husband and an old friend of Ignatius Gallaher. He is nicknamed "Little Chandler" because of his below-average height and delicate, well-groomed appearance. Little Chandler works an unfulfilling job as a clerk at King's Inn, a legal institution in Dublin, Ireland. He dreams of success and recognition as a poet but has been too timid to bring his dreams to fruition. With a "melancholy," passive, resigned personality, Little Chandler has drifted along in life, vaguely dissatisfied, until one day his old friend Gallaher visits Dublin and invites him to meet at a fancy restaurant. Gallaher left Dublin eight years before to pursue a more adventurous life as a journalist in London. As their meeting approaches, Little Chandler becomes lost in dreams of a more exciting, meaningful life. He grows to feel more empowered, imagining success and personal reinvention as a professional writer. However, upon meeting Gallaher, Little Chandler is somewhat let down. Gallaher's manners and appearance are coarse, and his time away from Dublin has only worsened his already questionable morality. Their meeting leaves Little Chandler resentful and thwarted, as he feels that he's more deserving of success than Gallaher is. These feelings only increase when Little Chandler returns home. Charged with caring for his infant son, he bungles this job badly and makes the baby cry hysterically. Annie chastises Little Chandler harshly, and the story ends with him in tears, once again resigned to his sad, small existence. In the end, Little Chandler experiences an epiphany that he is a "prisoner for life." He is trapped by the mundane world of work and domesticity that he fell into through his fearful inability to pursue his passion. Little Chandler's dreams are much like the "**Little Cloud**" of the story's title: small and fleeting, drifting away just as quickly as they appeared.

Ignatius Gallaher – Ignatius Gallaher is an old friend of Little Chandler. A native Dubliner, he immigrated to London eight years before the story takes place and is now back for a visit. It's rumored that Gallaher left Dublin because of money troubles brought on by his careless, alcohol-ridden lifestyle. Despite these flaws, he possessed undeniable talent and charisma. During Gallaher's time away, he has made the most of these attributes and achieved success as a journalist for the London Press. Moreover, he has been able to travel widely throughout Europe, experiencing the pleasures of Paris in particular. For Little Chandler, Gallaher represents everything missing from his own life: an engaging personality, career success, cosmopolitan experiences, and personal freedom. However, when the pair meet at a fancy restaurant to catch up, Little Chandler's expectations are not fully met. While Gallaher does appear successful, he is also prematurely aged, coarse, and vulgar. Moreover, his travels seem primarily to have allowed him to indulge in petty vices and sensual pleasures. Gallaher shows no signs of changing his lifestyle, remarking that he does not plan to settle down and start a family—unless he were to marry for money. Little Chandler is left feeling resentful of Gallaher's success and freedom. The contrast between the two makes Little Chandler more conscious of his own limitations in life. Moreover, Gallaher's characterization shows that while Dublin may hinder one's prospects (as Little Chandler believes the city has done for him), emigration may hold out a false hope for personal growth and reinvention. Gallaher has achieved financial and career success, but his personal flaws have only grown worse in his time abroad, and he lacks the self-awareness to perceive any need for improvement.

Annie – Annie is Little Chandler's overworked, frazzled, ill-tempered wife. They have been married for less than two years and have an infant son. Already the marriage is showing signs of strain. Because of limited income, they cannot afford to keep a servant to help with housekeeping and childcare. Annie's sister, Monica, comes in for two hours a day, but otherwise these responsibilities fall solely to Annie. Readers only see Annie from Little Chandler's point of view, and she simply appears as yet another dissatisfying aspect of his life. After his meeting with Gallaher, Little Chandler begins to see Annie as cold, small-minded, and conventional. When Annie goes out to run an errand at the end of the story, she returns to find the baby crying hysterically. Her anger at Little Chandler is fierce: she demands to know what he did to the baby, glaring at her husband with hate in her eyes. By contrast, she takes the baby and coos at him gently, trying to soothe his distress: "Mamma's

little lamb of the world!...There now!" This further heightens Little Chandler's sense of imprisonment by his mundane life and his resignation to his fate. He chose the conventional path of marriage and family, and now has to live with the often-disappointing consequences of that choice. Moreover, his lack of connection to Annie leaves him with no one to turn to for comfort when he realizes that his life is an inescapable trap. In fact, his marriage to her is a major component of his imprisonment.

The Baby – The unnamed infant son of Little Chandler and Annie appears in the last part of the story. At the end of their meeting, Gallaher congratulates Little Chandler for fathering a son: "Bravo! [...] I wouldn't doubt you, Tommy." It is implied that Little Chandler is proud of his small family when he invites Gallaher to spend an evening with them. However, the child ends up representing Little Chandler's imprisonment by life. Little Chandler is charged with caring for the baby while Annie runs an errand, but grows so frustrated with his crying son that he shouts at the infant, making him cry even more. At the very end of the story, the baby stops crying just as Little Chandler starts to cry himself, suggesting a symbolic role reversal wherein Little Chandler is reduced to a fragile, pathetic child. Like his infant son, Little Chandler is small and helpless. Unlike an infant, though, Little Chandler is aware of his helplessness, leading to his devastating sadness and sense of resignation.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RESIGNATION VS. EMPOWERMENT

Many stories in *Dubliners* feature characters whose dreams have been thwarted—whether because of happenstance, social obligations, or their own personal limitations, Joyce's characters are often frustrated by their limited lives. Little Chandler, the protagonist of "A **Little Cloud**," is no exception. He is portrayed as a timid man with a small life, and at the beginning of the story, he seems resigned to his fate. However, a visit from his old friend Gallaher prompts him to reassess his life. Eight years prior, Gallaher emigrated from Dublin to London pursue a career in journalism—a daring move that contrasts sharply with Chandler's own safe, limited life. As Chandler prepares for their reunion, he grows dissatisfied with the stasis of his life and he begins to feel a new sense of empowerment that reignites his dreams of being a famous poet. However, Little Chandler's empowerment is short-lived—much like "a little cloud" passing through the sky—as he moves from resignation to empowerment, then back to an even deeper resignation. Through his progression, Joyce shows that while imagining success and fulfillment is a first step toward change, real empowerment only happens when dreams translate into action.

Little Chandler is introduced as unmanly, sad, and passive. Although he flirts with the idea of being a poet, he's held back by timidity. Little Chandler's appearance conveys "the idea of being a little man," hence his name. He is described in feminine terms, with his "white and small hands," "fair silken hair," a perfumed handkerchief, and manicured fingernails. He even has "childish white teeth," making him seem more like a little boy than an adult man. As he looks out the window of his office, taking a break from "tiresome writing," Chandler sees "the glow of a late autumn sunset" on "decrepit old men who drowsed on the benches." These images of lethargy mirror Little Chandler's state: a passive spectator of life, not an active participant. Watching these people, Chandler feels "a gentle melancholy." This sadness prompts a feeling of resignation and helplessness: "He felt how useless it was to struggle against fortune." Chandler's melancholy, resigned thoughts turn to his love of poetry, which he's never shared with his wife since "shyness had always held him back." He merely repeats lines to himself, an activity that "console[s] him." For Chandler, poetry an unrealized dream and solitary activity that soothes his sadness rather than a passion that ignites his spirit.

However, as Chandler prepares to meet up with Gallaher—a man of action, at least in Chandler's eyes—Chandler begins to more seriously consider the possibilities of his own life. In imagining success, Chandler seems poised to finally make his dreams a reality. Chandler remembers his friend Gallaher, seeing him as a role model for success, "a brilliant figure on the London Press." Chandler can remember "many signs of future greatness" in Gallaher. Just imagining Gallaher's life leads to Chandler to feel vicariously empowered. Chandler grows critical of his surroundings, and "for the first time in his life" he feels superior to his fellow Dubliners on the streets. He notices their "dull inelegance" and calls them "a band of tramps." Instead, he imagines that emigrating like Gallaher is the only path to success because "You could do nothing in Dublin."

Chandler's new feeling of empowerment leads him to imagine a more successful life as a poet. Yearning to escape his "sober inartistic life," he judges that he is at the right age (32), with a "temperament [...] just at the point of maturity." He believes himself to have a "poet's soul": melancholy but "tempered with [...] faith and resignation and simple joy." Losing himself in dreams of fame, Chandler imagines future success. He pictures recognition by the English press and "a little circle of kindred minds." He imagines reviewers praising his poetry's "Celtic note." Chandler even imagines renaming himself to capitalize on his Irishness. He would adopt his mother's Irish-sounding

name, Malone, transforming himself from Thomas Chandler to T. Malone Chandler. Chandler's daydreams of success are rich and detailed, and he seems poised to finally take the steps necessary to achieve them.

While Chandler's imagination gives him an escape from his dull life, it does not actually spur him to take action. Daunted by the idea of taking concrete steps to actually achieve his dreams, Chandler finds himself even more resigned to his fate at the end of the story than he was at the beginning. At the story's conclusion, Chandler sinks back into gloomy resignation over his life. Chandler's thoughts are full of the possibilities raised by meeting Gallaher again: "Could he not escape from his little house? Was it too late for him to try to live bravely like Gallaher? Could he go to London?" Even though Gallaher proved shallow and crass rather than cultured and refined, encountering him made Chandler imagine change. However, he fails to take action to change his life, instead resigning to timidly question different possibilities. Chandler picks up a volume of poetry, longing to write. However, he is interrupted his crying baby. His frustration grows as he is unable to focus, and he begins to see his whole life as hopeless: "It was useless. He couldn't read. He couldn't do anything. He was a prisoner for life." Chandler becomes even more resigned than he was at the beginning of the story, seeing himself as a prisoner, powerless to change or escape his state. The final images of the story reinforce just how resigned and powerless Little Chandler has become: as his wife comforts their crying baby, he stands to the side, "tears of remorse" filling his eyes. He is remorseful and ashamed for making the baby cry. But it also seems that he feels remorse for his life and inability to create meaningful change in it and live his dreams. With this bleak ending, Joyce spins a cautionary tale, showing readers how, as the popular adage goes, nothing changes if nothing changes.

THE ILLUSIONS OF SUCCESS

In many of the stories in *Dubliners*, Joyce portrays Dublin, Ireland as excessively conventional, morally strict, and provincial. After growing dissatisfied with his birthplace, Joyce himself left Dublin early in his life and spent the majority of his years as an expatriate in continental Europe. Like Joyce, Gallaher is an émigré and thus represents an image of success and sophistication for Little Chandler, who is stuck in Dublin. However, their meeting deflates Chandler's idealistic view of his old friend as Gallaher appears crass, vulgar, and even morally corrupted. While Chandler assumes that moving to a more cosmopolitan place will turn a person into a more refined version of themselves, Gallaher's characterization proves that this is not always the case. Gallaher's emigration did not improve him—his seedy lifestyle abroad has actually exacerbated his preexisting character flaws. Through Gallaher's portrayal, the story shows that emigration holds out a false promise of career success, escape from provincial morality, and personal sophistication—dismantling the age-old adage that "the grass is greener on the other side." Through Gallaher, Joyce shows that while Ireland may have its problems and limitations, leaving it is not necessarily a cure-all, either.

Gallaher immigrated to London to pursue a career in journalism, and he has achieved fame. However, he seems dissatisfied with his profession, as does Chandler by the end of their meeting. Upon meeting Chandler, Gallaher playfully mocks his own aged appearance, blaming it on the stresses of his career: "It pulls you down [...] Press life. Always hurry and scurry." He grouses about journalism's fast pace, which requires "looking for copy and sometimes not finding it: and then, always to have something new in your stuff." He is happy to have some time off, exclaiming, "Damn proofs and printers, I say, for a few days." Gallaher makes his career (which Chandler has imagined as glamorous and important) seem instead tiresome, petty, and frustrating. By the end of their meeting, Little Chandler feels deeply resentful over Gallaher's success. He denigrates Gallaher's profession as "tawdry journalism," reflecting that "he could do something better than his friend had ever done"—if only he had the chance to leave Dublin.

In addition to being disappointed with Gallaher's career, Chandler is let down by Gallaher's poor manners. With his heavy drinking and vulgar, coarse way of speaking, Gallaher does not fit Chandler's image of the sophisticated, successful expatriate. Gallaher drinks heavily throughout the meeting with Chandler and he pressures Chandler to do the same, several times saying things like, "I say Tommy, don't make punch of that whisky: liquor up." Moreover, Gallaher's manners and speech disappoint Chandler. For example, when discussing Paris, Gallaher says "I've been to the Moulin Rouge [...] and I've been to all the bohemian cafes. Hot stuff! Not for a pious chap like you, Tommy." Chandler is left feeling "somewhat disillusioned" by Gallaher's coarse manner. He reflects that "There was something vulgar in his friend which he had not observed before." With this, Chandler begins to realize that simply leaving Dublin doesn't make someone glamorous or cultured.

Far from being a sophisticated expatriate, Gallaher instead comes off as pleasure-seeking, morally seedy, and callous. Through this portrayal, the story shows that living abroad actually can have a corrupting influence. Chandler asks Gallaher hopefully about Paris: "is it really as beautiful as they say?" Gallaher seems confused by the question, as if he had never considered it, and he contradicts himself: "Beautiful? [...] It's not so beautiful, you know. Of course, it is beautiful." He then shifts to talk about the Paris's nightlife and its "gaiety, movement, excitement." He seems uninterested in the art and culture of Paris and only interested in the opportunities it offers for sensual pleasure-seeking. Indeed, gaining knowledge of vice and immorality has been a main feature of Gallaher's

experience of travel in continental Europe. He describes to Chandler "some pictures of the corruption which was rife abroad." He does not describe the art and culture of Europe but instead focuses on sordid gossip: "He revealed many of the secrets of religious houses on the Continent and described some of the practices which were fashionable in high society and ended by telling, with details, a story about an English duchess." Chandler playfully teases Gallaher about marrying someday, but Gallaher dismisses the possibility crudely: "No blooming fear of that, my boy." He takes a calculating, unromantic view of marriage. Dismissing love as "mooning and spooning about," he insists that his future wife will "have a good fat account at the bank." Gallaher's vulgar, callous attitude shows through as he brags about the "thousands of rich Germans and Jews" he would have to choose from should he set his sights on marriage. Gallaher's already-questionable morality has been corrupted by living abroad, corroding his views on life and love. Prior to leaving Dublin, Gallaher was somewhat seedy. Chandler recalls Gallaher then, remembering that "People used to say that Ignatius Gallaher was wild." He socialized with "a rakish set of fellows [...] drank freely and borrowed money on all sides." It was rumored that he had to leave Dublin because of "some shady affair, some money transaction." While he has achieved career success, it has merely given him the financial freedom to express his morally questionable tendencies more fully than he could in Dublin.

Joyce himself was an expatriate, and in his portrayal of Gallaher, he seems to be speaking from experience. While he does portray Dublin as stagnant, conventional, and limited in its opportunities for success, he also shows that Chandler's idealized view of living abroad—"if you wanted to succeed you had to go away"—is, in fact, a naïve oversimplification. Gallaher has achieved some career success, but he has also been coarsened and corrupted by the seedy underbelly of life on the continent. Chandler (and the reader through him) face the hard truth that while one's current location might have a host of problems, leaving it won't necessarily lead to personal improvement.

THE PRISON OF THE MUNDANE

Gallaher's career success suggests to Little Chandler that he, too, could achieve more in life if he could only escape the limitations of Dublin. However, upon meeting Gallaher, Chandler's bubble of expectation is burst. No longer a role model for success, Gallaher instead fuels Chandler's disappointment and causes him to grow resentful. Reconnecting with Gallaher doesn't end up inspiring Chandler to pursue poetry or leave Dublin in the pursuit of greater opportunities. Instead, their meeting causes Chandler to feel more deeply limited, dissatisfied, and resentful about his mundane, ordinary life. He is chained to an overworked and short-tempered wife, with an infant child to take care of, unable to pursue his dreams of writing poetry. Many of the stories in *Dubliners* end with the main character experiencing an epiphany (a sudden realization), and at the end of "A **Little Cloud**," Little Chandler has such an epiphany. He realizes that he is "a prisoner for life," locked in a self-created prison of fear, inaction, and resentment—he is as helpless as an infant to change his fate. Through Chandler's inability to change his life, Joyce shows how the mundane is a prison—living a mundane life leads people to lose their zest for life and capacity for action.

Chandler feels deeply alienated from his wife, Annie, whom he sees as overworked, angry, changeable, and ordinary. The limitations of their mundane domestic life have caused Chandler to disconnect from her, and their strained marriage contributes to his larger sense of dissatisfaction and paralysis. Due to limited funds, Chandler and Annie cannot keep a servant, so Annie bears sole responsibility for taking care of their home and small child, with occasional help from her sister. She is clearly overworked, leading to her to "bad humour" and "short answers" to Chandler. She orders him around impatiently, as if he were a child. Consequently, Chandler feels disconnected from her, even slightly intimidated by her. His efforts to please her and connect with her often backfire. He recalls an incident where he tried to buy her a nice blouse: Annie at first sharply criticized the blouse as too expensive but then she loved it after trying it on. Chandler's effort to do something nice for Annie faltered because of their limited income. Even though she ends up accepting the blouse, the incident left Chandler wary of her, seeing her as fickle and vain. More generally, Annie's personality dissatisfies Chandler. He meditates on a photograph of her in their house: though pretty, Annie appears "unconscious," with "no passion" and "no rapture." Chandler sees "something mean" in her face—petty and small. He longingly thinks of the "rich Jewesses" Gallaher has met in Europe, and the women's "dark Oriental" eyes. He regrets his marriage to the prim Annie: "Why had he married the eyes in the photograph?" He has no real connection to her, reducing her to mere body part instead of seeing her as his life partner. Annie seems as dissatisfied with Chandler as he is with her, as shown by her explosive anger toward him. Upon returning home from running an errand, she finds Chandler trying to soothe their crying baby. She glares at Chandler, yelling, "What have you done to him?" She assumes that an ordinary fact of domestic life—a crying baby—must be Chandler's fault. As Chandler looks fearfully into his wife's eyes, "his heart closed together as he met the hatred in them." The image of Chandler's heart closing up shows the extent to which the ordinary stresses of his home life have caused him to lose connection to his wife and whatever affection he once felt for her.

Similarly, Chandler's efforts to escape into poetry are thwarted by the mundane realities of his home life, and his anger and

frustration only exacerbate the situation. While Annie is out running errands, Chandler watches the baby. Bored and unhappy, he opens a volume of Lord Byron's poetry. Reading Byron's melancholy lines, Chandler yearns to write poetry like it. However, he is interrupted by the baby's cries. Chandler's frustration grows as he is unable to focus, and his epiphany occurs as he sees his whole life as hopeless: "It was useless. He couldn't read. He couldn't do anything. He was a prisoner for life." Full of anger and a deeper resentment at his limited prospects, Chandler's anger grows to the point that he actually screams "Stop" in the baby's face. As would be expected, this exclamation only makes the child scream and "sob piteously," and Chandler's attempts to quiet the child only make it cry "more convulsively." Chandler's effort to escape into poetry fails as he is called back to his fatherly duty of comforting his infant. Rather than accepting this completely normal situation, Chandler's frustration erupts into anger that only traps him further in his mundane domestic world.

At the story's conclusion, Chandler's epiphany—that he is imprisoned by his life—is heightened by imagery of the ordinary realities of Chandler's home life making him feel deeply alienated, hopeless, and paralyzed. Annie returns from her errand, enraged to find the baby sobbing convulsively, and she immediately blames Chandler. She soothes the infant: "My little man! My little mannie! Was 'ou frightened, love? There now, love!" Ironically, not just her infant son, but another "little man"—her husband—is deeply distressed and in need of comfort. However, Annie cannot know this they since their relationship is so estranged. Blamed and dismissed by his wife, Chandler steps back into the shadows, distancing himself physically and emotionally from his wife and child. He feels paralyzed and powerless to change the situation. As the baby stops crying, Chandler himself begins to cry: "tears of remorse started to his eyes." The parallelism between the baby and Chandler's crying suggests that he is so imprisoned by his ordinary life that he is like a crying baby: consumed by discontent, helpless, powerless to change anything, with no language but a cry.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

LITTLE CLOUD

The central symbol of "A Little Cloud" is contained in the story's title, as the cloud represents the story's protagonist, Little Chandler. The parallelism of the initials—Little Cloud/Little Chandler—suggests that Chandler is like a cloud himself. Specifically, the symbol of a little cloud represents Little Chandler's feelings of insignificance, his overreliance on imagination, and the fleeting nature of his empowerment. Like a small cloud in a vast sky, Little Chandler is a small man in the large city of Dublin, Ireland. He holds a low-status job and has achieved little so far in life. Clouds can certainly be quite large and ominous, often portending violent rain and storms. Indeed, dark, foreboding clouds are often present in Romantic writing (of which Little Chandler is a fan) as symbols for intense passion. However, Little Chandler is more like a *little* cloud, suggesting that his feelings are weak and his passions are petty.

Little Chandler dreams of a more significant, meaningful life as a successful poet. However, like a cloud, Little Chandler's dreams prove to be insubstantial and hollow—much like a cloud drifts and dissolves, Chandler's dreams evaporate just as quickly as they appear. In this sense, the image of a cloud floating through the sky captures Chandler's character arc. He begins the story resigned and "melancholy," then feels more empowered and hopeful before meeting with his old friend Gallaher (a successful journalist) because he thinks Gallaher's connections could be the key to his own success as a writer. However, Little Chandler sinks back into an even deeper, more resigned sadness at the story's conclusion when he returns home and realizes he's trapped in his life. Little Chandler's feeling of hopeful empowerment is like a little cloud drifting through the sky—fleeting and inconsequential.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Dubliners* published in 1993.

A Little Cloud Quotes

Little Chandler's thoughts ever since lunch-time had been of his meeting with Gallaher, of Gallaher's invitation and of the great city London where Gallaher lived. He was called Little Chandler because, though he was but slightly under the average stature, he gave one the idea of being a little man. His hands were white and small, his frame was fragile, his voice was quiet and his manners were refined. He took the greatest care of his fair silken hair and moustache and used perfume discreetly on his handkerchief. The half-moons of his nails were perfect and when he smiled you caught a glimpse of a row of childish white teeth.

Related Characters: Ignatius Gallaher, Thomas Chandler / Little Chandler

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

Early in the story, Little Chandler sits at his desk at work, contemplating his memories of his old friend Ignatius Gallaher and eagerly anticipating their upcoming meeting. Chandler's view of Gallaher as the picture of success is introduced slowly: Gallaher residence in "the great city London" associates him with the city's "greatness" as center of commerce, industry, and culture for the British Empire. As such, the reader can infer that Chandler holds a similar view of Gallaher (as a London resident) as "great," a cosmopolitan and sophisticated counterpart to Chandler's own bland life in Dublin.

Chandler's nickname of "Little" is also explained here: it refers partly to his height, but more to the overall impression he gives of being decidedly unmanly. Chandler's body, hands, and teeth make him seem like a "little man" or even a child. This physical description forecasts the theme of Little Chandler being held back in his development—even stunted—by his environment (both the city in which he lives and his stifling home life) and his own timidity. Moreover, contrasting with Gallaher's portrayal as successful and empowered, Chandler's quiet voice, refined manners, and perfumed handkerchief characterize him as stereotypically weak and feminine. In the early 20th century (when the story is set), gender roles required that women be proper, refined, and passive, while men were expected to be more active and forceful. Describing Chandler as physically effeminate therefore suggests that he lacks the empowered self-assertion expected of men at the time.

On his way to meet Gallaher at a fancy restaurant, Corless's, Little Chandler walks the Dublin streets and thinks about the restaurant. Joyce loved fine dining, and Corless's was a popular restaurant in Dublin at the time known for its fine French cuisine and opulent atmosphere. The fact that Little Chandler has never been to Corless's suggests that he does not mix in elite circles. By picturing the environment in his mind, he feels more hopeful and empowered as he imagines mixing with these stylish, wealthy people. Naming the male restaurant patrons with the old-fashioned word "cavaliers" makes them sound even more upper-class, as if they were debonair aristocratic gentlemen from a more romantic age. Similarly, the imagery used to describe the women conveys sophistication and wealth—their dresses are so elaborate that they make noise, they are "richly dressed," and they wear makeup. Moreover, they are described as looking like Atalanta, a beautiful virgin huntress from Greek mythology, making them seem even more elevated and idealized.

Little Chandler's head swims with visions of associating with such impressive, successful people in this stylish environment—he seems to believe that the patrons and staff at Corless's are superior to the working- and middle-class citizens of Dublin simply because they look (and speak) the part of what he idealizes as a glamorous lifestyle. By associating even tangentially with this scene, Chandler is beginning to see himself as part of their world, which further contributes to his naïve assumptions about what success looks like as well as to his gnawing sense of disillusionment with his own mundane life.

> He had never been in Corless's but he knew the value of the name. He knew that people went there after the theatre to eat oysters and drink liqueurs; and he had heard that the waiters there spoke French and German. Walking swiftly by at night he had seen cabs drawn up before the door and richly dressed ladies, escorted by cavaliers, alight and enter quickly. They wore noisy dresses and many wraps. Their faces were powdered and they caught up their dresses, when they touched earth, like alarmed Atalantas.

Related Characters: Ignatius Gallaher, Thomas Chandler / Little Chandler

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66-67

Explanation and Analysis

> As he crossed Grattan Bridge he looked down the river towards the lower quays and pitied the poor stunted houses. They seemed to him a band of tramps, huddled together along the riverbanks, their old coats covered with dust and soot, stupefied by the panorama of sunset and waiting for the first chill of night bid them arise, shake themselves and begone. He wondered whether he could write a poem to express his idea. Perhaps Gallaher might be able to get it into some London paper for him. Could he write something original? He was not sure what idea he wished to express but the thought that a poetic moment had touched him took life within him like an infant hope. He stepped onward bravely.

Related Characters: Ignatius Gallaher, Thomas Chandler / Little Chandler

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

As Little Chandler continues to walk through Dublin on his way to Corless's, he notices the city's dingy, pitiful appearance and he feels empowered by imagining himself associating with Gallaher in a posh environment. Consequently, he begins to look down on Dublin, seeing himself as superior to the city and imagining a different life for himself. His critical attitude comes through in the imagery used to describe the houses: they are "stunted" —hindered or slowed by malnourishment, dwarfed—suggesting that Dublin holds its inhabitants back from their full potential. This connects to the imagery previously used to described Chandler himself: he appears similarly trapped in an underdeveloped, childlike physical state, mirroring and embodying the stunted potential around him. Moreover, Chandler compares the houses to a dirty "band of tramps," suggesting not only literal poverty but spiritual and cultural impoverishment. This fleeting thought—that "a poetic moment had touched him"—prompts Chandler to imagine a new life for himself as successful poet. Joyce's narrative style brings the reader close to Chandler's budding dream with language close to what he could actually be thinking: "Could he write something original?" This new hope leads Chandler to feel stronger and more empowered as he walks more "bravely."

❝ The English critics, perhaps, would recognise him as one of the Celtic school by reason of the melancholy tone of his poems; besides that, he would put in allusions. He began to invent sentences and phrases from the notice which his book would get. *Mr Chandler has the gift of easy and graceful verse....A wistful sadness pervades these poems...The Celtic note.* It was a pity his name was not more Irish-looking. Perhaps it would be better to insert his mother's name before the surname: Thomas Malone Chandler, or better still: T. Malone Chandler. He would speak to Gallaher about it.

He pursued his revery so ardently that he passed his street and had to turn back.

Related Characters: Ignatius Gallaher, Thomas Chandler / Little Chandler

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68-69

Explanation and Analysis

As Chandler walks the Dublin streets, he envisions a bright future for himself as a poet. His visions of the future become quite elaborate and specific, and it's clear that he pictures himself writing poetry not for personal expression, but as a way to gain recognition and success like Gallaher's. Chandler would "put in allusions" in his poetry, not because they add to its meaning, but to gain praise from critics. Success for Chandler, then, seems to equate to status and public renown rather than the personal fulfillment that genuine artistic expression brings. His desire for praise and recognition comes through even more clearly when he fabricates favorable reviews of his future work—he thinks that he would be considered by critics part of the Celtic school, a group of Irish writers who at this time promoted Irish culture and nationalism. However, Little Chandler appears to have no desire to honor his homeland in his work—he merely sees his Irishness as a means to gain fame abroad. To this end, he would even change his name to seem more authentically Irish to English readers and critics. However, his "revery" bears little connection to reality, as suggested when he misses his turn to the restaurant because he is lost in thought.

❝ Ignatius Gallaher took off his hat and displayed a large closely cropped head. His face was heavy, pale and clean-shaven. His eyes, which were of bluish slate-colour, relieved his unhealthy pallor and shone out plainly above the vivid orange tie he wore. Between these rival features the lips appeared very long and shapeless and colourless. He bent his head and felt with two sympathetic fingers the thin hair at the crown. Little Chandler shook his head as a denial. Ignatius Gallaher put on his hat again.

—It pulls you down," he said. Press life. Always hurry and scurry, looking for copy and sometimes not finding it: and then, always to have something new in your stuff. Damn proofs and printers, I say, for a few days.

Related Characters: Ignatius Gallaher (speaker), Thomas Chandler / Little Chandler

Related Themes:

Page Number: 69-70

Explanation and Analysis

Arriving at the restaurant, Little Chandler meets his old friend Gallaher and notices his physical appearance. In the eight years since they last saw each other, Gallaher has aged prematurely: he appears balding, pale, and unhealthy. His

lack of color is mentioned three times, and his bright blue eyes and orange tie only draw more attention to the "unhealthy pallor" of his skin and lips. Gallaher is aware of his physical changes and attributes them to the stress of his job as a journalist: he says, "It pulls you down," suggesting that his work is not energizing or inspiring, but rather heavy and weary. This contrasts greatly with the glamorous life of a writer that Little Chandler was imagining for himself as he walked to the restaurant, suggesting that Chandler holds a naïve view of both the publishing industry and of what success actually entails. Moreover, as a journalist, there is constant pressure for novelty to meet the "hurry and scurry" fast pace required of reporting the news. Gallaher seems so cynical toward his work that he even swears referring to it. This first impression he makes—of being worn down by his career—begins Little Chandler's process of revising his idealized view of Gallaher as a model of sophistication and career success abroad.

❝ —I've been to the Moulin Rouge, Ignatius Gallaher continued when the barman had removed their glasses, and I've been to all the Bohemian cafés. Hot stuff! Not for a pious chap like you, Tommy.

Little Chandler said nothing until the barman returned with two glasses: then he touched his friend's glass lightly and reciprocated the former toast. He was beginning to feel somewhat disillusioned. Gallaher's accent and way of expressing himself did not please him. There was something vulgar in his friend which he had not observed before. But perhaps it was only the result of living in London amid the bustle and competition of the Press. The old personal charm was still there under this new gaudy manner. And, after all, Gallaher had lived, he had seen the world. Little Chandler looked at his friend enviously.

Related Characters: Ignatius Gallaher (speaker), Thomas Chandler / Little Chandler

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71-72

Explanation and Analysis

Little Chandler and Gallaher catch up with each other: they first discuss their mutual acquaintances, and then the conversation turns to Gallaher's travels in continental Europe. Chandler asks about Paris, and Gallaher describes the Paris nightlife, including his patronage of the Moulin Rouge. This famous Parisian cabaret was a center of the city's vibrant and decadent nightlife, known for elaborate and risqué performances (the can-can dance was born there) as well as patronage by courtesans, or high-class prostitutes. Gallaher was a reckless, impulsive young man before he left Dublin, and Chandler assumed that Gallaher's success as a journalist meant he'd also become more responsible and mature over the years. However, Gallaher has clearly only grown more acquainted with the seedy underbelly of life in his time abroad, shattering Chandler's preconceived image of expatriates as somehow more sophisticated than Dubliners.

Gallaher bluntly calls refers to Parisian nightlife as "hot stuff" and states that the more proper, reserved, "pious" Chandler would not find it appealing. Indeed, Chandler's silence suggests that he's put off by Gallaher's description, and his thoughts about his friend are mixed: he feels "disillusioned" by Gallaher's vulgarity and "gaudy manner" and his friend is falling from the pedestal Chandler had put him on. At the same time, Chandler tries to excuse Gallaher's coarse speech—perhaps it is a byproduct of his travels. Despite being a bit disheartened, Chandler still envies Gallaher's worldly knowledge and exciting lifestyle.

❝ —I'll tell you my opinion, said Ignatius Gallaher, emerging after some time from the clouds of smoke in which he had taken refuge, it's a rum world. Talk of immorality! I've heard of cases—what am I saying?—I've known them: cases of…immorality....

Ignatius Gallaher puffed thoughtfully at his cigar and then, in a calm historian's tone, he proceeded to sketch for his friend some pictures of the corruption which was rife abroad. He summarised the vices of many capitals and seemed inclined to award the palm to Berlin. Some things he could not vouch for (his friends had told him), but of others he had had personal experience. He spared neither rank nor caste. He revealed many of the secrets of religious houses on the Continent and described some of the practices which were fashionable in high society and ended by telling, with details, a story about an English duchess—a story which he knew to be true. Little Chandler was astonished.

Related Characters: Ignatius Gallaher (speaker), Thomas Chandler / Little Chandler

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

Gallaher and Little Chandler continue their discussion of Gallaher's travels abroad. In response to Chandler's tentative questions about the European continent's reputation for decadence and immorality, Gallaher describes what he has seen and heard about. Joyce does not relate the specifics of Gallaher's stories, but it is clear that Gallaher gives Chandler a detailed description of "corruption [...] rife abroad." He even describes vices practiced in religious houses—convents and monasteries—where one would expect moral strictness. Gallaher has heard of and witnessed many examples of seedy behavior, and given that describing it forms such a large part of his conversation with Little Chandler, it seems that exploring vice and participating it has been a major of Gallaher's cosmopolitan lifestyle. His earlier tendencies toward raucous, pleasure-seeking living have been amplified by his travels. Chandler is thusly taken aback that his friend, who he assumed to had become an image of sophistication and success in his years as an expatriate, has become so corrupted.

Additionally, this passage contains the only literal reference to the symbolism of the cloud in the story. The "little cloud" in the story's title, which conjures imagery of a small cloud that passively drifts through the sky, symbolizes Chandler's fleeting sense of empowerment and hope for a better life. But here, Gallaher's clouds of cigar smoke are likely dark and therefore more like a storm cloud: they represent his opulent and decadent life and make him seem almost like an oracle, emerging from the clouds to enlighten Chandler on the ways of European decadence.

❝ He felt acutely the contrast between his own life and his friend's and it seemed to him unjust. Gallaher was his inferior in birth and education. He was sure that he could do something better than his friend had ever done, or could ever do, something higher than mere tawdry journalism if he only got the chance. What was it that stood in his way? His unfortunate timidity! He wished to vindicate himself in some way, to assert his manhood. He saw behind Gallaher's refusal of his invitation. Gallaher was only patronising him by his friendliness just as he was patronising Ireland by his visit.

Related Characters: Ignatius Gallaher, Thomas Chandler / Little Chandler

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75-76

Explanation and Analysis

As Little Chandler and Gallaher's meeting draws to a close, Little Chandler takes stock of his feelings about Gallaher. Even though Gallaher has proven to be a flawed model of success, not living up to Chandler's expectations, Chandler still feels envious of him. As Little chandler has done throughout the story, here he merely imagines success and fame for himself rather than taking action to achieve it. His earlier dreams of recognition as a poet sour into resentment over Gallaher's success compared to his own life. Instead of feeling empowered or inspired, he feels "patronis[ed]"—put down or condescended to—by Gallaher. Feeling this way is doubly bitter to Chandler since Gallaher is below him in "birth and education," suggesting that Chandler sees himself as inherently superior and that he has squandered his advantages.

Chandler tries to counter this feeling of inferiority to Gallaher by putting him down in return, referring to his journalism as "tawdry" or morally-corrupted. However, this thought only deepens Chandler's resentment since it leads him to the idea that he has simply been denied opportunity. Finally, Little Chandler takes responsibility for his life, realizing that he can only blame himself for lack of success comparable to his friend's. This doesn't mean that Chandler takes action in response to this realization, though—in Chandler's desire to "assert his manhood," Joyce shows that he has actually reverted back to his earlier, more feminine, weaker mindset.

He looked coldly into the eyes of the photograph and they answered coldly. Certainly they were pretty and the face itself was pretty. But he found something mean in it. Why was it so unconscious and ladylike? The composure of the eyes irritated him. They repelled him and defied him: there was no passion in them, no rapture. He thought of what Gallaher had said about rich Jewesses. Those dark Oriental eyes, he thought, how full they are of passion, of voluptuous longing!...Why had he married the eyes in the photograph?

He caught himself up at the question and glanced nervously round the room. He found something mean in the pretty furniture which he had bought for his house on the hire system. Annie had chosen it herself and it reminded him of her. It too was prim and pretty. A dull resentment against his life awoke within him. Could he not escape from his little house? Was it too late for him to try to live bravely like Gallaher? Could he go to London?

Related Characters: The Baby , Ignatius Gallaher, Annie, Thomas Chandler / Little Chandler

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78-79

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the story, Little Chandler sits at home alone, taking care of his infant son. His wife, Annie, is out running errands, and in her absence, Chandler contemplates a photograph of her; just as Chandler is dissatisfied with Dublin and his career prospects, he takes a critical view of Annie. The lack of affection between the couple is captured in the image of his looking "coldly" into her photograph and her image returning the cold stare. Though Annie is pretty, something is lacking in her for Chandler. He sees "something mean" in her face. In the early 19th century, when "A Little Cloud" was written, the word "mean" used this way usually did not denote cruelty; rather, it suggested pettiness and smallness. Annie is too conventional, properly "ladylike," and unromantic for Chandler, who harbors dreams of becoming a renown poet who's well-respected by highbrow intellectual crowds. Chandler remembers the exotic women Gallaher described during their meeting and, true to form, he drifts into imagining a better reality for himself with them.

Turning his attention to the room, Chandler extends his critical dissatisfaction to the furniture: like his wife, it is "too prim and pretty." Chandler, the "little man" with a little life, yearns to escape his wife and their "little house" which he feels imprisons him in a world of mundane domesticity. However, since he lacks to ability (or perhaps simply the will) to do so, all he can do is turn his feelings on himself as "a dull resentment."

—What have you done to him?" she cried, glaring into his face.

Little Chandler sustained for one moment the gaze of her eyes and his heart closed together as he met the hatred in them. He began to stammer:

—It's nothing.... He ... he began to cry.... I couldn't ... I didn't do anything.... What?

Giving no heed to him she began to walk up and down the room, clasping the child tightly in her arms and murmuring:

—My little man! My little mannie! Was 'ou frightened, love?... There now, love! There now!... Lambabaun! Mamma's little lamb of the world!... There now!

Little Chandler felt his cheeks suffused with shame and he stood back out of the lamplight. He listened while the paroxysm of the child's sobbing grew less and less; and tears of remorse started to his eyes.

Related Characters: Thomas Chandler / Little Chandler, Annie (speaker), The Baby

Related Themes:

Page Number: 80-81

Explanation and Analysis

In the story's final scene, Chandler yells in frustration at his crying child, causing the baby to wail even more intensely. Just then, Annie returns home, irate to find her son in such great distress. The last paragraphs of the story drive home the themes of Chandler's entrapment by the mundane realities of his life and powerless resignation to his fate. His estranged relationship with Annie is highlighted by her hatred of him: she assumes the worst of Chandler, "glaring" at him with hatred in her eyes, causing Chandler to shut down emotionally. Their distance is shown again as she ignores his faltering explanations, "giving no heed to him." Additionally, Annie's tender soothing of the baby contrasts sharply with her harsh treatment of Chandler, showing how the stress of parenthood has driven them apart, trapping Chandler in an uncongenial home life. In response to Annie, Chandler stammers, showing his uncertainty, weakness, and fear of his wife. His statement that "I couldn't... I didn't do anything" refers not only to his childcare, but his inability to take action in life more generally. As Annie takes the child, Chandler feels a sense of shame: not that he has *done*

something bad or wrong, but that he is *fundamentally* bad or wrong. As Chandler begins to cry, he trades places symbolically with the baby: though a grown man and family breadwinner, he has become as powerless and helpless as an infant.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

A LITTLE CLOUD

Little Chandler reflects on seeing his old friend Gallaher off at the North Wall when Gallaher left Dublin eight years ago. Little Chandler recalls admiring Gallaher's appearance, well-traveled air, and fearlessness. He thinks that not many men have Gallaher's talents and that "he had deserved to win." Since lunchtime today, Little Chandler hasn't been able to stop thinking about Gallaher's invitation to meet, and about the city of London where Gallaher now lives.

Little Chandler's nostalgic reflections on Gallaher imply that he hasn't seen his old friend in the years since he moved away. Chandler's preoccupation with and clear admiration of Gallaher—particularly the word choice that Gallaher "deserved to win"—suggest that Chandler sees life as a contest or game of winners and losers.

Chandler is nicknamed "Little" because of his small and delicate appearance. He is slightly below average height, with small, white hands, a fragile frame, and a quiet voice. Little Chandler also has "fair silken hair," a perfumed handkerchief, well-manicured fingernails, and small, white teeth like those of a child.

Little Chandler's physical description as small and weak sets up the theme of Chandler's resignation to his fate and powerlessness to change it: his being "little" indicates not only his small stature but his lack of strength and manly assertiveness. The details of his "fair silken hair," well-groomed appearance, and small teeth make him seem feminine and even childlike, further portraying him as a weak, inadequate man by traditional standards.

Little Chandler continues to sit at his desk at King's Inn, where he works, and ponder his old friend. Gallaher has become very successful as a journalist for the London Press in the eight years since he left Dublin. Lost in thought, Little Chandler frequently turns to look out the window, taking a break from his "tiresome writing." He notices the sun setting on some old men sleeping on benches and sees children as they play and scream in the streets. These sights make Little Chandler feel sad and resigned, and he muses that it is useless to fight against fate and fortune. His thoughts turn to his poetry books at home. He bought them when he was a bachelor, but since getting married, he has been too shy to read them to his wife. Instead, Little Chandler reads alone to console himself.

Little Chandler's thoughts of Gallaher consume his mind—their meeting is clearly very important for Chandler. Once again, Chandler's thoughts of Gallaher's career achievements indicate that he sees his old friend as a model of success. By contrast, Chandler feels passive and sad in his own life; his work is "tiresome," not inspiring or energizing. Furthermore, the passage's imagery—the sun setting on the sleeping men and playing children—suggests life winding down and losing vitality, mirroring Chandler's own sense of fated resignation. Meanwhile, Chandler's interest in poetry is evidently not a vocation or even a hobby, but an unrealized dream and a consolation for his sadness. The fact that Chandler is too shy to read poetry to his wife suggests that his personal life is also lacking and it foreshadows the couple's strained relationship that comes to a head at the end of the story.

At the appointed time, Little Chandler leaves his office and makes his way through the streets. He passes "grimy children" crawling up doorsteps and avoids all of the "vermin-like" people in the street as he walks. Even so, he is full of joy at the prospect of meeting Gallaher at a fancy restaurant called Corless's, which is patronized by a wealthy, stylish clientele. Little Chandler has never been to this establishment before, and he pictures the people he will see: well-dressed women and men dining on oysters and drinking liqueurs after the theater, attended on by waiters who can speak German and French. Little Chandler usually walks the streets somewhat fearfully, not looking into the buildings he passes. However, he sometimes deliberately chooses to walk down dark, narrow streets, walking boldly though still trembling with fear.

Though Little Chandler has been characterized as weak, passive, and melancholy, the impending meeting with Gallagher seems to imbue Chandler with a newfound sense of assertiveness and self-worth. Chandler's thoughts as he walks the Dublin streets reveal that he's beginning to feel superior to his surroundings, as evidenced by his perception of the "grimy" children and "vermin-like" people—to Chandler, they seem like rodents or insects, dirty and subhuman. However, Little Chandler begins to feel more hopeful as he imagines the opulent crowd at Corless's. Chandler's fantasies about wealthy, sophisticated people show that he yearns for a more successful, cosmopolitan, exciting life. Meanwhile, the fact that the usually-fearful Chandler does occasionally push himself to face his fears suggests that he at least has the potential for boldness and self-assertion.

Continuing on his way to Corless's, Little Chandler thinks about Gallaher. No one would have believed eight years ago that Gallaher would become a such a successful London journalist. He drank, partied, and borrowed money. In fact, it's rumored that Gallaher had to leave Dublin because of money troubles. However, Little Chandler remembers that his friend always showed signs of future achievement. No one could deny that Gallaher was obviously talented and had something special in him that couldn't be defined. Even when Gallaher faced setbacks and was low on money, he "kept up a bold face." Everyone seemed to admire Gallaher.

In Chandler's mind, Gallaher represent boldness, talent, and success. Gallaher comes off as a reckless, irresponsible bohemian. Yet despite his carefree lifestyle, he defied expectations by becoming successful in London—what Gallaher lacks in responsibility, he makes up for with talent, self-confidence, and self-possession, enabling him to succeed against the odds and win the good opinion of others. At this point, Gallaher represents an idealized picture of success to Chandler—and given the story's characterization of Chandler as weak and unsuccessful thus far, it seems as though Gallaher's character is somewhat of a foil to Chandler's.

Little Chandler picks up his pace as he continues to walk the streets, repulsed for the first time by the city's grubbiness. He notices the "poor stunted houses" and likens them to a group of vagrants huddled together. He thinks of writing a poem to capture this image. Feeling inspired, he wonders if Gallaher could get his poem published in London. Little Chandler then loses himself in dreams of becoming a successful poet. He believes he has the right "melancholy" temperament and dreams of finding recognition by a small, appreciative readership. Little Chandler imagines English critics praising him as part of the "Celtic school" and makes up sentences they would write about him. He even ponders changing his name, incorporating his mother's more Irish-sounding name to become Thomas Malone Chandler—or, even better, T. Malone Chandler. He gets so lost in these thoughts that he passes his turn for Corless's and has to go back.

Chandler's thoughts turn from Gallaher to his environment and his own dreams of success. He continues to feel more empowered as he walks to the restaurant, seemingly because being associated with Gallaher (a successful writer) and the sophisticated crowd at Corless's boosts Chandler's confidence. Again, Chandler sees Dublin as unappealing and grubby, indicating his growing dissatisfaction with the city and his sense of superiority to it. Calling the houses "stunted" suggests that Dublin somehow limits its inhabitants' potential, implying that Dublin has also stunted Chandler. He is beginning to think that he is meant for better things and he dreams of recognition outside of Ireland by sophisticated English critics. The "Celtic school" refers to a group of early 20th-century Irish writers who promoted Irish culture and heritage. Chandler, however, has no affinity for Ireland nor any desire to promote it—he merely sees being part of the Celtic school as a means of achieving recognition and success. To this end, he envisions the slight deception of changing his name to capitalize on his Irishness for personal benefit. Meanwhile, missing his turn subtly shows how disconnected from reality these fantasies truly are.

Finally arriving at the restaurant, Little Chandler is at first confused by the sights and sounds and feels that everyone is looking at him. However, collecting himself, he realizes that no one is staring. Then Little Chandler sees Gallaher, who addresses him warmly and orders malt whiskey for Little Chandler and himself. Gallaher comments on his own aged appearance. He is balding and pale, with shapeless and pale lips. His eyes are blue and he wears an orange tie. Gallaher attributes his worn appearance to the stresses of his job as a journalist and the pressure of always looking for new stories. Their drinks arrive—Gallaher drinks his whiskey straight, but Little Chandler dilutes his with water, telling his friend that he doesn't drink much. They toast to old times and old friends.

Here, the contrast between Little Chandler and Gallaher is highlighted: Chandler seems like a fish out of water, timid and self-conscious. However, he does gather himself together, suggesting that he has the potential to be confident and capable. Gallaher, by contrast, is talkative, easygoing, and self-possessed—he is also candid and self-deprecating, as seen when he comments on his own looks. Though Gallaher has been successful, his aged appearance combined with his complaints about stress suggest that the life of a writer is not nearly as glamorous as Chandler naïvely imagines. Meanwhile, Gallaher's eyes and tie are symbolic: his blue eyes hearken to St. Patrick's blue, traditionally associated with Ireland, while the orange of his tie suggests an association with England since orange is the color associated with Irish Protestants (Protestantism having been brought to Ireland during English reign). The fact that Gallaher is wearing both of these colors suggests that he has become somewhat of a hybrid Anglo-Irishman during his time abroad.

Little Chandler and Gallaher begin catching up. They discuss their mutual acquaintances: some have done well, while others have fallen on hard times. Gallaher notices that Little Chandler hasn't changed. He is still as serious as he was eight years ago when he would lecture Gallaher during his hangovers. Gallaher tells Little Chandler he should travel more, especially after learning that Little Chandler has only been to the Isle of Man. He encourages Little Chandler to go to Paris. Little Chandler asks Gallaher if Paris is really as beautiful as people say it is, and Gallaher seems a bit confused by the question. He talks about Paris nightlife at the Moulin Rouge and other bohemian cafés, calling the city "hot stuff." Little Chandler feels envious of Gallaher, though he also observes a new vulgarity in his friend's way of talking. However, Gallaher's old charm is still present under his showy manners.

The two men's conversation, further displays their differences and further characterizes Gallaher as cosmopolitan, if a bit vulgar. Little Chandler has remained the same since eight years ago: from Gallaher's point of view, Chandler still seems conventional and dutiful. Gallaher also sees Little Chandler as provincial and limited by his lack of travel since Chandler has only ever visited the Isle of Man, a small island between Ireland and England. Contrasting with Chandler's provincialism, Gallaher has traveled more widely—to Paris, for instance. However, his preference for nightlife over art and culture suggests that his old partying ways have persisted and grown. Though still charming, Chandler is beginning to see that Gallaher has become coarse and vulgar, as shown his speech (for example, referring to Paris's nightlife as "hot stuff"). Chandler is beginning to revise his idealization of Gallaher as the picture of worldly success—

Gallaher continues telling Little Chandler about Paris. Little Chandler asks about the city's reputation for immorality. Gallaher seems to evade the question, in response, making "a catholic gesture" and claiming that "every place is immoral." He sings the praises of the Paris student balls and the *cocottes* (prostitutes). As they continue to drink, Gallaher tells Little Chandler stories of the corruption and vices he's observed in his European travels. These stories include secrets from religious institutions and the practices of fashionable society. He ends his monologue with a scandalous story about an English duchess. Little Chandler is left feeling "astonished" by Gallaher's tales.

Gallaher has become part of the morally-questionable, seedy underbelly of nightlife in continental Europe. Gallaher's "catholic gesture" refers not to the Roman Catholic Church, but to the lowercase word "catholic" that means broad and wide-ranging. As such, Gallaher presents himself to be open-minded, cosmopolitan, and a bit world-weary. However, the details of his stories focus on gossipy tales of scandal and debauchery, showing that Gallaher has become associated with—perhaps even corrupted by—this world. His earlier tendencies toward recklessness have found fertile ground for expression during his travels. The more reserved, unworldly Little Chandler is "astonished," not knowing what to make of Gallaher's racy tales.

The conversation then turns to Little Chandler's life over the past eight years. Little Chandler shares the news that he recently got married and has an infant son. He invites Gallaher to spend an evening with his family, but Gallaher declines because he has to leave Dublin the next day. They squeeze in one last drink, and the now rather tipsy Little Chandler reflects on his feelings about Gallaher. He feels jealous of his friend's success, which is heightened because Gallaher is beneath him in birth and education. He thinks that Gallaher blew off his invitation to visit his family. Little Chandler imagines that he could do even greater things than Gallaher's "tawdry journalism" if he had a chance. He feels that Gallaher looks down on him and wishes to reassert himself.

As their conversation begins to wind down, Little Chandler's feelings toward Gallaher shift from admiration to resentment. As a result, Little Chandler speaks of his small family with pride and even wishes to show them off to Gallaher. Perhaps because of Little Chandler's drunkenness, his resentment begins to build, and he feels slighted by Gallaher. Chandler's tendency to imagine *success rather than take steps to* achieve *it shows here as well. He feels the need to put down Gallaher's profession as "tawdry"—morally questionable and seedy—despite his idolization of Gallaher's journalistic talent mere hours ago, which suggests that Chandler is deeply bitter about how his own life ended up.*

Little Chandler teases Gallaher about perhaps being married the next time he visits Dublin. However, Gallaher dismisses this possibility, saying he still wants to see more of the world before he's tied down. An irritated Little Chandler persists, though, saying that one day Gallaher will put his "head in the sack" and get married. Gallaher concedes that he might marry, but not for love. Instead, he would marry for money, choosing one of the "thousands of rich Germans and Jews, rotten with money" that he has seen during his travels. Gallaher ends their meeting by tossing back the rest of his drink, laughing loudly, and saying that being tied to one woman "must get a bit stale."

Little Chandler tries to establish some superiority over Gallaher by teasing him for being single, implying that as a married man, Chandler is above him. This ploy to put himself over Gallaher backfires, though: Gallaher's response shows a negative, belittling, even contemptuous attitude toward marriage. His use of the slang phrase for getting married—to put one's "head in the sack"—likens marriage to going to execution (when hangings were common, prisoners being led to the scaffold often had their heads covered). Gallaher's vulgar, materialistic attitude is evident once more in his stereotyping of European women, and his reference to marriage as "stale" foreshadows the end of the story in which the reader sees Little Chandler's own deeply unsatisfying marriage.

Back at home, Little Chandler sits alone, holding his infant son. His wife, Annie, who bears sole responsibility for taking care of the baby (with some help from her sister), has gone out to get tea and sugar. She is in a bad mood because Little Chandler was late for tea and forgot to pick up coffee on his way home. Little Chandler ponders a photograph of Annie. He recalls nervously buying her the blouse she's wearing in the picture. At first, Annie refused it because of its high price. Yet after trying the blouse on, she decided to keep it, kissing and thanking Little Chandler.

Chandler's home life is portrayed as mundane and dissatisfying. It is implied that Chandler forgot to pick up coffee on his way home because of his tipsiness—and though understandably annoyed by her husband's forgetfulness, Annie also comes off as grumpy and overworked by her domestic duties. In Chandler's reminiscence about the blouse, it is revealed that he timidly tries to please Annie and he might sometimes succeed. However, in Chandler's mind, Annie also is characterized as vain, materialistic, and changeable. They do not seem to have a close or fulfilling relationship, and their mutual unhappiness seems to suggest that they both feel imprisoned by married life and their domestic duties.

Looking closer at Annie's photo, Little Chandler notices that while his wife is pretty, she also appears cold, "unconscious and ladylike." He remembers the rich Jewish women Gallaher mentioned, with their "dark Oriental eyes." Little Chandler wonders why he married Annie. He looks around the room, dissatisfied with its "prim and pretty" furniture. He asks himself if it is too late to escape and live a life like Gallaher's in London. If Little Chandler could publish a book, he might be able to do the same.

Just as Little Chandler has come to see Dublin as not good enough for him, he sees his home life as inferior and stifling and he fantasizes about escaping it. Chandler's low opinion of Annie is incompatible with the life he truly wants to live: he imagines himself as an intellectual and an artist, whereas he thinks of his wife as lacking feeling and substance, too conventional and uptight. Drifting again into fantasy, Little Chandler desires new, more exotic experiences, as shown by his memory of the women from Gallaher's stories and their "dark Oriental eyes." Chandler is even dissatisfied with the room's furniture: it is too much like his wife who chose it, too "prim and pretty," conventional and lacking the romance and style Chandler idolizes. Chandler's dreams of emulating Gallaher and publishing a book of poetry is yet another way for him to escape into his imagination as an alternative to his mundane environment.

Next, Little Chandler picks up a book of poetry by Byron and starts to read it. He reads wistful lines about a man visiting his lover's tomb, feeling the poetry's depth and yearning to write poetry like it. He thinks of all the feelings he would like to express, including his impressions of Dublin from earlier in the day. Then, the baby wakes up and begins to cry. Little Chandler tries to calm his son, but he only cries more. Unable to read, Little Chandler's frustration grows. He thinks to himself that not only can he not read, "He couldn't do anything [...] He was a prisoner for life." In anger, he shouts, "Stop!" in the baby's face.

Little Chandler's choice of Byron is significant. English Romantic poet Lord Byron lived and travelled widely throughout continental Europe, in voluntary exile from England due to rumors of personal scandal. He thus represents the same sort of sophistication, passion, and free-spirited defiance of convention that Gallaher embodies, and for which Chandler yearns. However, Chandler is pulled out of this fantasy and back to the mundanity of his home when his reading is interrupted his crying baby. Chandler's feelings in response to this ordinary reality of parenthood are exaggerated: he feels so frustrated by his life that this annoyance makes him think in absolute terms that he is completely powerless and trapped for the rest of his life by the domestic duties represented by the baby. His intense frustration erupts in his yelling at his son, a rather irrational response considering the baby isn't purposefully crying to spite Chandler.

Little Chandler's shouting only frightens the baby, who begins to cry so hard that Little Chandler worries the baby might die. Just at that moment, Annie returns, frantic to find her child so upset. She glares at her husband, angrily asking what he did to their child. Little Chandler sees the hatred in his wife's eyes. She ignores his excuses, takes the baby, and begins soothing him. Little Chandler falls back, standing out of the light and feeling his cheeks flush with shame. As the child stops crying, Little Chandler's eyes fill with "tears of remorse."

The story's conclusion encapsulates Little Chandler's resignation and imprisonment by his mundane, ordinary life. As would be expected, Little Chandler's yelling at the crying baby only makes the situation worse, and his frustrated sense of powerlessness shows in his paranoid fantasy that the baby could die. Annie seems to be equally disenchanted with her life and particularly her marriage, as her quickness to blame Little Chandler for the crying baby suggests a great deal of underlying resentment. Chandler's total estrangement from Annie is reinforced by the image of hate in her eyes. At the story's conclusion, Little Chandler is a pitiful figure, like an infant himself: uncomforted and alone, weak, and powerless to change his state. His dreams of becoming leaving Ireland and becoming a writer like Gallaher have passed just as quickly as they came, and he has essentially become the childlike figure suggested earlier by his physical appearance. Chandler's "tears of remorse" show not only regret for yelling at the baby, but also regret for the life choices that have led to such a defeated, hopeless state.


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