

William Saroyan

The Human Comedy



Free Audiobook

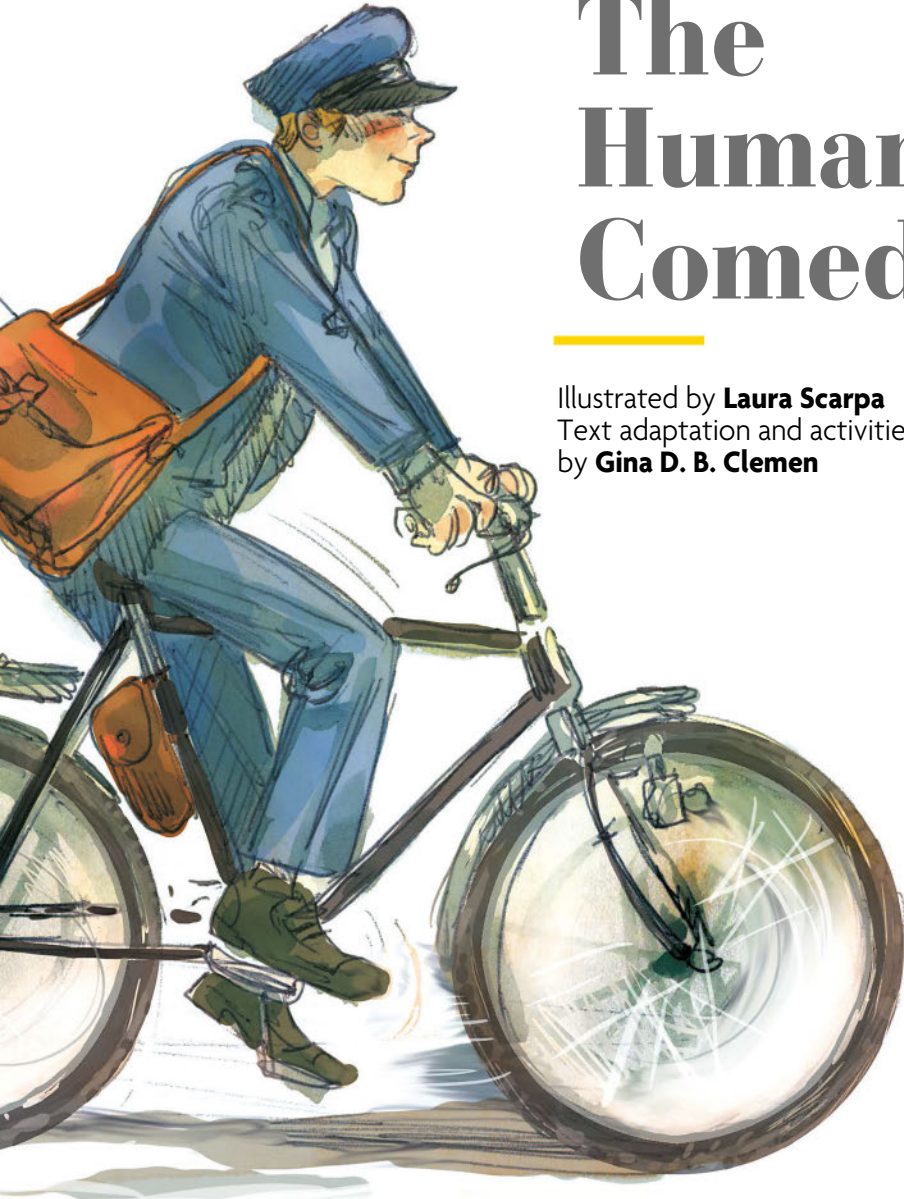
BESTSELLER
contemporary



William Saroyan

The Human Comedy

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THE STORY IS FULLY RECORDED



William Saroyan

William Saroyan was one of America's greatest writers and playwrights. 'With his fresh, lively style he wrote about the lives of ordinary people with their daily hopes, dreams and problems. He had a great understanding of people and their feelings.

William Saroyan was born on August 31, 1908 in Fresno, an important agricultural center in the San Joaquin Valley in California. His parents were immigrants from Armenia.² He grew up in Fresno with his brother and sister. His father died when he was a young boy and his mother had to work in a cannery³ to support the family.

Saroyan worked at several jobs in order to help his family and to pay for his education. He always enjoyed reading books and writing short stories. His first stories were published in 1930 in a monthly magazine called *Overland Monthly*. In 1934 he became famous with his story *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*.

He traveled to Europe and met other important writers and playwrights. In 1940 he published a short-story collection, *My Name Is Aram*, and it became an international bestseller. The stories are

1. playwright : a person who writes plays.

2. Armenia : a country in Western Asia.

3. cannery : a factory where food is put into cans.

about a boy named Aram and the colorful members of his Armenian family. Saroyan won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in the same year.

In 1943 he published *The Human Comedy*, a partly autobiographical⁴ novel that was very successful. He set the story in his hometown Fresno, but changed its name to Ithaca. The film adaptation of *The Human Comedy* won the Academy Award for the Best Story in 1944.

The Human Comedy has several references to Homer's *Odyssey*. The *Odyssey* is a famous ancient Greek epic poem. Homer is the name of both the author of the *Odyssey* and the main character of Saroyan's novel. Homer's little brother is called Ulysses, the main character of Homer's *Odyssey*. *The Human Comedy* takes place in the fictional town of Ithaca, which is also the name of Ulysses' hometown in Greece. Saroyan did this because *The Human Comedy* and the *Odyssey* have a common theme:⁵ a person's home and family, a place where a person belongs.

During his life Saroyan wrote many great novels, plays and short stories. He died on May 18, 1981 at the age of 72. Today there is the William Saroyan House Museum in Fresno, where the author lived and worked during the last seventeen years of his life.

4. autobiographical : about yourself.

5. theme : an important idea throughout a story.

1 Comprehension Check • Answer these questions.

1. Where did Saroyan's parents come from?
2. Where did Saroyan grow up?
3. Why did Saroyan work at different jobs?
4. Which of Saroyan's books became an international bestseller?
5. Which award did the film adaptation of *The Human Comedy* win?
6. Which famous Greek epic poem did Saroyan refer to in *The Human Comedy* and why?



California

The Human Comedy takes place in the San Joaquin Valley in California, during the Second World War (1939-1945). The United States entered the war in December 1941 and some of the characters in this story are soldiers who are going to war in Europe, the Pacific and Asia.

California became the 31st state of the United States in 1850. Today it has a population of about 40 million people. Sacramento is the state capital and other important cities are San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego and San Jose. California has the richest economy in the USA with its huge high-technology industries in Silicon Valley related to social media, the movie industry, tourism and agriculture.

California is on the Pacific Ocean and has a varied geography with long beaches on the coast, valleys, high mountains and beautiful national parks. California has nine national parks, more than any other state in America. California has many laws that protect the environment, biodiversity and sustainability.¹

1. sustainability : looking after our planet and not wasting our resources, because they must last for future generations.

1 Comprehension Check • Answer these questions.

1. When did California become a state of the United States?
2. What is the state capital of California?
3. Which industries are important in California?
4. What is the geography of California like?
5. How many national parks are located in California?

The characters

Mrs
Macaulay

Bess

Mary

Homer

Mr Spangler

Mr
Grogan

Ulysses

BEFORE YOU READ

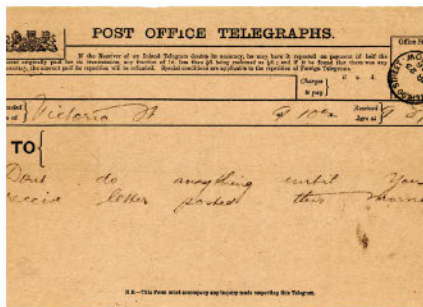
1 Match the words with the correct definition. Use a dictionary if necessary.

1. ☐ slums
2. ☐ principal
3. ☐ to stare
4. ☐ spectators
5. ☐ furious
6. ☐ to whisper
7. ☐ orphan
8. ☐ telegraph
9. ☐ Morse code
10. ☐ messenger
11. ☐ to rattle
12. ☐ hospitality

- a** to speak very softly
- b** a bad part of town where poor families live
- c** to make short, knocking sounds
- d** the headmaster of a school
- e** a system of sending messages over long distances by electricity or radio signals
- f** to look at for a long time
- g** a person who delivers something
- h** very, very angry
- i** an international code used for sending messages with short and long sounds or beeps, which are then sent as dots and dashes (... / ---). The dots and dashes represent the 26 letters of the English alphabet and 10 numbers.
- j** friendly, welcoming behavior toward guests or visitors
- k** a person who has no parents
- l** people who watch a sports event

2 Match the words with the correct picture.

typewriter hurdles telegram lunch box apricot phonograph



1



2



3



4

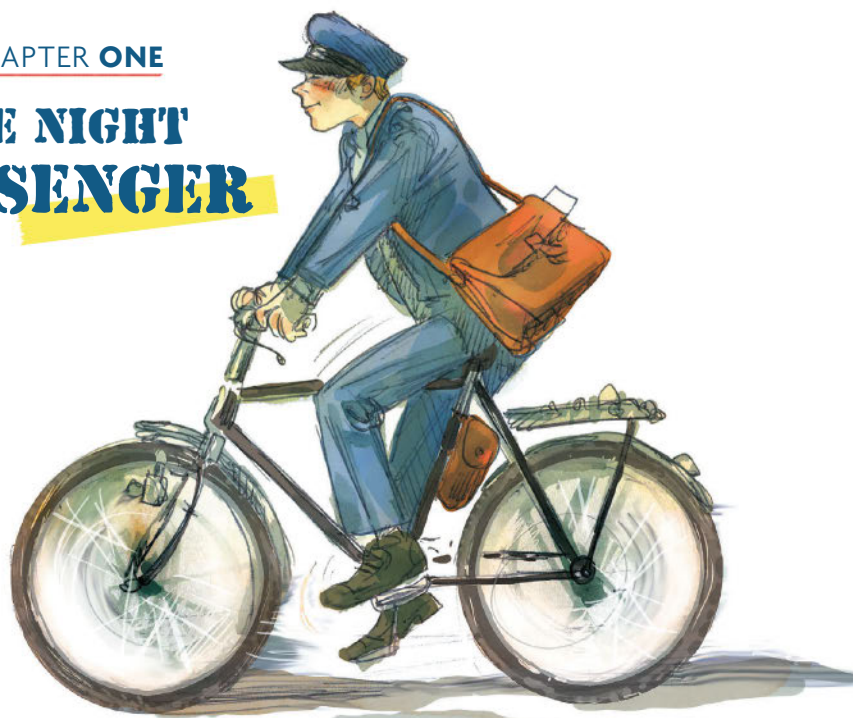


5



6

THE NIGHT MESSENGER



Little Ulysses Macauley was standing in the garden of his house on Santa Clara Avenue in Ithaca, California. He was looking in amazement at a mouse that was coming out of a hole in the earth. Suddenly a bird flew into the old tree in the garden and Ulysses looked at it.



track 02

Then he felt the earth under his feet shake and he heard the noise of a train that was passing by. He thought it was the fastest thing in the world. He waved to the engineer who was driving the train but he didn't wave back to him. Then he heard an Afro-American man singing on the train. Ulysses waved to him and the man waved back, shouting: "I'm going home, boy – going back where I belong." They waved to each other a few more times.

The train passed and Ulysses looked at the world around him – it was strange, wonderful, beautiful and lonely. He went back home and as soon as he saw his mother feeding the chickens, he smiled



and ran to her. They walked into their small house together and saw sister Bess and her friend Mary Arena. They were playing the piano and singing happily.

The sun was slowly going down and a peaceful evening was coming to Ithaca. Ulysses's brother Homer sat on his bicycle crossing a dirt road. He was wearing a telegram messenger's coat and cap. He was alone on the country road and he started to sing. At the end of the country road there was a big sign that said:



It was 7.02 p.m. when Homer finally reached the telegraph office in the city center where he had a part-time job. Inside the telegraph office Homer saw Mr Spangler, the manager of the office. He was busily counting the words of a telegram that a worried young man gave him.

"Fourteen words," Spangler said.

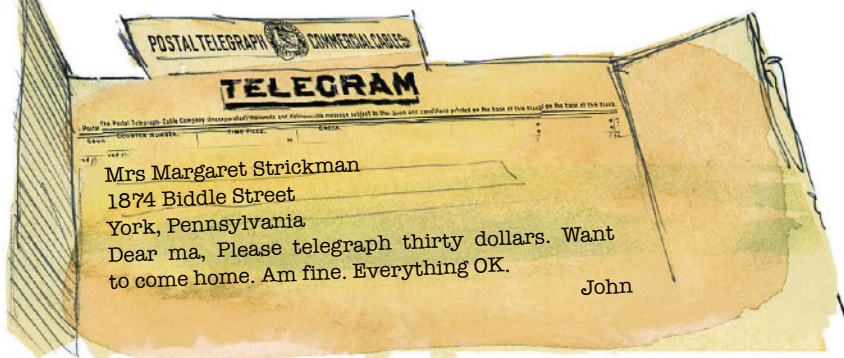
"When will my mother receive this telegram?" asked the worried young man.

"It's rather late in the East now," said Spangler. "There's a nine-hour difference with the West, and it's not easy to get money late at night. But I'll send the telegram immediately." Spangler put his hands in his pockets and pulled out some money.

"Here," he said, "take this money, just in case you need it. You can pay me back when your mother sends the money."

The young man looked at the money in amazement. "How can I thank you?" He rushed out of the telegraph office. Spangler took the telegram to William Grogan, the old night telegraph operator, and said, "Send it, Willie. I'll pay for it myself. Poor guy, he has problems."

Mr Grogan began to send the telegram in Morse code, letter by letter:



Homer studied the delivery desk to see if there were any telegrams to deliver.

Mr Spangler looked at him and asked, “How do you like your new job as a messenger?”

Homer replied, “I like it better than anything else! I go to a lot of different places and I see a lot of different people.”

“You really like this job, don’t you?” said Spangler, laughing.

Homer smiled and said, “I’m going to be the best messenger you’ve ever had!”

“Good!” replied Spangler, looking kindly at Homer. “But be careful. Deliver the telegrams quickly but don’t go too fast. Be polite with everyone and take your hat off in elevators. And, of course, don’t lose a telegram.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Working at night is different from working in the day,” said Spangler. “When you have to deliver a telegram to a bad part of town at night, it can scare a young guy. But you don’t need to be scared. Remember, people are people. Don’t be afraid of them. How old are you?”

“Ah, sixteen,” Homer said, nervously.

“You said that yesterday, but we’re not supposed to hire a boy unless he’s at least sixteen. However, I wanted to hire you. How old are you really?”





“Fourteen.”

“Well, you’ll be sixteen in two years,” said Spangler. “You’re now part of the telegraph office – you’re the night messenger! What are you going to do with the fifteen dollars a week?”

“I’m going to give them to my mother,” said Homer, “in order to help the family. I’m old enough to help them with my part-time job.”

“That’s great!” said Spangler. “Here’s a quarter.¹ Go to Mr Chatterton’s Bakery and get me two day-old pies – apple and coconut cream. They’re two for a quarter since they’re from yesterday.”

“Yes sir, I’ll be right back with the pies,” said Homer, running out of the office.

Mr Spangler looked at the old telegraph operator and asked, “Willie, what do you think of him?”

“He’s a fine boy,” said Mr Grogan.

1. quarter :





“He comes from a good, poor family. His father’s dead, his brother Marcus is in the Army. His sister goes to State College and his poor mom works in a cannery during the summer. I’m glad I hired him. I realize that some families don’t have an easy life. Well, I’m going home now,” said Spangler, putting on his coat and hat. “You and Homer can eat the pies. See you tomorrow.”

After a few minutes Homer walked in with the two pies. The old telegraph operator broke one of the pies into four parts and they began to eat the coconut cream pie. While they were eating the pie, Mr Grogan started to talk to the new messenger.

“Homer, my name’s Willie Grogan and I’m sixty-seven years old. I’m one of the oldest telegraph operators in the world! I’m proud of my job because it’s so important. I get messages from everywhere. If I fall asleep sometimes, just throw some cold water on my face and I’ll wake up! You know, my job is the most important thing I have. I’m not married, I don’t have a family – I’m alone and my job is... *my life*.” Grogan’s eyes were suddenly dark and sad as he continued eating the pie.

THINK!

Homer earned fifteen dollars a week with his part-time job and he wanted to give them to his mother. He said that he was old enough to help his family. Homer was a *responsible* boy. He went to high school and had a part-time job, working at night. It certainly wasn’t easy for him.

Being *responsible* is part of growing up. What does *growing up* mean to you?

- a ☐ You are responsible for your behavior and your actions.
- b ☐ People start to depend on you, and you can help them.
- c ☐ You have to think carefully before making a decision.
- d ☐ You have more freedom.

