

See If I Care

by ReadWorks

As I reflect in my old age on my accomplishments and disappointments, my triumphs and regrets, I wonder if I distort the truth to ascribe a certain, shall we say, significance to events. Is it wrong to interpret events symbolically? Perhaps I have read too many books. Perhaps I long to assign order and meaning to what is mere randomness, mere chance.

And yet (call me old-fashioned if you'd like) a life without meaning strikes me as unacceptable, even impossible, because to me it seems the more things change, the more they stay the same. I consider chaos, chance, and randomness nothing more than the newest attempts to explain this inexplicable life.

Of course I am thinking of my career, my meteoric rise to editor-in-chief and my ruination, which at the time seemed wholly without cause or explanation. Even then, it is true, I considered Grady Maxwell my story's villain. But I did not hate the man. I almost rather pitied him. No longer. He has grown in my mind over the years, and so too has his importance to my story. Maxwell's very brilliance blinded me to the traps he laid, and I fell into them, helpless.

But I do not like to dwell on evil. I occupy my days with my hobbies. I have a wonderful collection of butterflies, the joy of my life, including the astonishingly rare Greta oto, the glass winged butterfly, which I captured in the marshlands of southern Mexico. I never married, and so I have been spared the grotesque decay of love. I sit on my back porch as evening arrives, the mockingbirds calling from within the hawthorns I planted with my own hands, the deep blue of the Northern California sky bruising into purple, and when finally it blackens, I finish the last of my lemonade and rise and head upstairs to bed. No husband to nag me. No children to ignore me, condescend to me, and send me to a home. Had I married I would probably still be in Albany, New York, that horrid city, buried under three feet of snow.

In all fairness, I liked it well enough when I ran the newspaper. Albany is no New York City, and not exactly Chicago or Boston or Los Angeles or-well, I could go on. But it is the capital of the most powerful state of the most powerful country in the world, famed for its outsized ambitions and its cloak and dagger politics. And who guards against the corruption and the back-door dealings? The press, of course. The newspaper. And who watches over the paper? The editor-in-chief. That was me.

I was lavished upon. Expensive dinners, invitations to the best parties, high society, under-the-table gifts of all sorts-there seemed no end to the citizenry's gratitude. And though I accepted-it would have been rude to do otherwise-never once did I allow this tribute to affect my judgment, nor the clarity of my vision, nor the tenacity with which I pursued the corrupt. I gave thanks, and then I returned to the boardroom with justice in my heart and the glint of the righteous in my eye.

I had plenty of enemies. But I knew who my enemies were, and according to the old saying, I kept them closer than my own friends. I always sat with my back to the wall, so to speak. That is why the Maxwell business haunts me still, because all my precautions came to naught. Though I was conspired against, it was I myself who blundered headfirst to ruin.

In one of fate's strange coincidences, Maxwell joined the staff the same week I was promoted to

editor-in-chief. (His hiring process had already been handled; I had nothing to do with it.) I worked those first few months at a feverish pitch and hardly noticed Maxwell. He was after all only one of many reporters working the local political beat.

How vividly I can even now recall the day he marched into my office in his ratty tweed jacket and without a word threw onto my desk that plain, unlabeled manila folder and looked at me with just the slightest hint of a smile-how devious that smile!-that played about his mouth and especially his eyes (never trust a smile in the eyes) as he planted himself before my desk, arms crossed, waiting for me to speak first.

"Maxwell, is it?" I asked without shifting in my chair. He huffed. "Take a look," he replied in that gravelly baritone of his, and he nodded at the folder on my desk. I picked it up, opened it, and inspected the contents in their entirety. It took all my restraint to mask my surprise. I've always prided myself on maintaining the composure proper to the editor of a major paper. But what I saw was frankly shocking. In the folder were six photos that appeared to show Waylon Thatch, Albany's then-mayor and a close friend of mine, in what we in the business call a compromising position. The photos seemed to all have been taken around the same time, and judging by the mayor's appearance, it couldn't have been long ago. In them, Waylon was with one of the suspected crime leaders in our area, exchanging a mysterious package. It was suspicious, to say the least. I asked Maxwell where he had gotten the photos. He said it came from a contact of a contact, who claimed to be part of a local cult. He claimed the secret society was composed of the city's elite. Perhaps his contact had an axe to grind with the mayor, who knew?

What a fool I was. I chased that scandal doggedly, with everything I had. I was young and brash. I envisioned a career-defining story, an editorship with the *New York Times*, a nightly show on CNN. I was blinded to the obvious. The photos, of course, were fakes, brilliantly edited fakes. And though I've never been able to prove it, I am ironclad in my conviction that Grady Maxwell was not just another overeager reporter swept up in the ruse. He was in on it. He may even have been its principal architect.

Who but Maxwell emerged from the scandal unscathed? When the dust had settled, when the guillotine's echoes had faded and the rolling heads, mine chief among them, had ceased to roll, who still had a job? Maxwell.

Albany politics were a very shady affair. Someone had an axe to grind with me, that much now is clear. I had no idea how deep the corruption ran, and I still don't. I never will.

I am content merely to pass the rest of my days in quietude, sheltered from people and ignorant of politics. Let the country sink in its own mire, see if I care. Let the Grady Maxwells of the world scrabble tooth and claw for a seat at the feet of the mighty. See if I care.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What was the narrator's former job in Albany?

- A. politician
- B. TV reporter
- C. newspaper editor-in-chief
- D. photojournalist

2. What situation has the narrator struggled through?

- A. losing her job in a political scandal
- B. doing a job that she hates
- C. divorcing her husband
- D. being unable to have kids

3. The narrator believed that an article about the scandalous photos of the mayor would improve her career. What evidence from the story best supports this conclusion?

- A. "I was blinded to the obvious. The photos, of course, were fakes, brilliantly edited fakes."
- B. "I envisioned a career-defining story, an editorship with the *New York Times*, a nightly show on CNN."
- C. "What a fool I was. I chased that scandal doggedly, with everything I had. I was young and brash."
- D. "Albany politics were a very shady affair. Someone had an axe to grind with me, that much now is clear."

4. Read the following sentences: "Let the country sink in its own mire, see if I care. Let the Grady Maxwells of the world scrabble tooth and claw for a seat at the feet of the mighty. See if I care."

Based on the repeated phrase, "see if I care," what conclusion can you make about the narrator?

- A. The narrator no longer cares about power and politics.
- B. The narrator does not have strong feelings about Grady Maxwell.
- C. The narrator is not upset that Grady Maxwell stole her job.
- D. The narrator is trying to hide the fact that she actually cares.

5. What is this story mostly about?

- A. the cloak-and-dagger politics of Albany and its corrupt politicians
- B. how the press guards against political corruption and bribery
- C. the editor-in-chief of a newspaper who lost her job in a scandal
- D. the career of Grady Maxwell and how he became editor-in-chief

6. Read the following sentences: "I was **lavished upon**. Expensive dinners, invitations to the best parties, high society, under-the-table gifts of all sorts-there seemed no end to the citizenry's gratitude. And though I accepted-it would have been rude to do otherwise-never once did I allow this tribute to affect my judgment, nor the clarity of my vision, nor the tenacity with which I pursued the corrupt."

As used in this sentence, what does the phrase "**lavished upon**" most nearly mean?

- A. Someone spends lots of money on you and praises you.
- B. You allow someone to give you money or gifts in exchange for a favor.
- C. You spend a lot of money to buy yourself nice things.
- D. You become greedy and corrupt after receiving many gifts.

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

The narrator believes that Maxwell was part of the scandal that made her lose her job;
_____, she has not been able to prove Maxwell's guilt.

- A. therefore
- B. however
- C. obviously
- D. for example

8. Who does the narrator blame for the loss of her job as editor-in-chief?

9. How does the narrator's view of Maxwell change over time?

10. "[Grady Maxwell] has grown in my mind over the years, and so too has his importance to my story."

Based on this information, what can you conclude about how the narrator has spent her time over the years? Does it seem like the narrator let go of her bitterness about losing her job? Support your answer using information from the passage.
