



The wind-swept ash-tree

This scene takes place at night. Paul, his brothers William and Arthur, and his sister Annie are upstairs in their bedroom and overhear a quarrel between their drunk father and their mother.

David Herbert
Lawrence
Sons and Lovers
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Chapter 4

When William was growing up, the family moved from the Bottoms to a house on the **brow**¹ of the hill, commanding a view of the valley, which spread out like a convex cockle-shell², or a clamp-shell³, before it. In front of the house was a huge old ash-tree⁴.
The west wind, sweeping from Derbyshire, caught the houses with full force, and the tree shrieked⁵ again. Morel liked it.

'It's music,' he said. 'It sends me to **sleep**.'

But Paul and Arthur and Annie hated it. To Paul it became almost a **demoniacal noise**. The winter of their first year in the new house their father was very bad. The children played in the street, on the brim⁶ of the wide, **dark valley**, until eight o'clock. Then they **went to bed**. Their mother sat sewing⁷ below. Having such a great space in front of the house gave the children a **feeling of night**, of vastness⁸, and of **terror**. This terror came in from **the shrieking of the tree** and the anguish of the home discord⁹. Often Paul would wake up¹⁰, after he had been **asleep** a long time, aware of **thuds**¹¹ downstairs. Instantly he was wide awake. Then he heard the **booming**¹² shouts of his father, come home nearly drunk, then the sharp replies of his mother, then the bang, bang¹³ of his father's fist¹⁴ on the table, and the nasty snarling¹⁵ shout as the man's voice got higher. And then **the whole was drowned**¹⁶ **in a piercing medley**¹⁷ **of shrieks and cries from the great, wind-swept ash-tree**. The children lay silent in suspense, waiting for a lull¹⁸ in the wind to hear what their father was doing. He might hit their mother again. **There was a feeling of horror**, a kind of bristling¹⁹ in the **darkness**, and a **sense of blood**. They lay with their hearts in the grip of an **intense anguish**. **The wind came through the tree fiercer and fiercer**. All the cords of the great harp hummed²⁰, whistled²¹, and shrieked. And then **came the horror** of the sudden **silence, silence everywhere**, outside and downstairs. What was it? Was it a **silence of blood**? What had he done?

The children lay and breathed the **darkness**. And then, at last, they **heard their father throw down**²² his boots and tramp upstairs in his stockinged feet²³. Still they listened. Then at last, **if the wind allowed**, they **heard the water** of the tap drumming²⁴ into the kettle²⁵, which their mother was filling for morning, and they could go **to sleep in peace**.

So they were happy in the morning – happy, very happy playing, dancing at night round the lonely lamp-post²⁶ in the midst of the **darkness**. But they had one tight place²⁷ of **anxiety** in their hearts, one darkness in their eyes, which showed all their lives.

Paul **hated** his father.

- 1 brow. Ciglio.
- 2 convex cockle-shell. Conchiglia convessa di cardio.
- 3 clamp-shell. Conchiglia di mollusco.
- 4 ash-tree. Frassino.
- 5 shrieked. Gridava.
- 6 brim. Orlo.
- 7 sewing. A cucire.
- 8 vastness. Vastità.
- 9 discord. Discordia.
- 10 would wake up. Si svegliava.
- 11 thuds. Rumori sordi.
- 12 booming. Che rimbombavano.
- 13 bang, bang. Battere.
- 14 fist. Pugno.
- 15 nasty snarling. Stridulo parlare rabbiosamente.
- 16 was drowned. Veniva annegato.
- 17 piercing medley. Penetrante mescolanza.
- 18 lull. Momento di calma.
- 19 bristling. Ira.
- 20 hummed. Emettevano un rumore sordo.
- 21 whistled. Fischiaavano.
- 22 throw down. Che si toglieva.
- 23 tramp ... feet. Saliva di sopra scalzo con passo pesante.
- 24 drumming. Tamburellare.
- 25 kettle. Bollitore.
- 26 lamp-post. Lampione.
- 27 tight place. Nodo.



VISUAL ANALYSIS

1 READ the text and identify its three parts. Then write a heading for each.

- Part 1 (lines):
- Part 2 (lines):
- Part 3 (lines):

2 LOOK at the visual analysis of the text and write down what each highlight and colour represents.

sleep



What feelings does nature convey?

feeling

What does the whole scene highlight?



What sense does the language of the text mainly appeal to?



How do they differ?

3 DISCUSS the following questions in pairs.

- 1 How many characters are involved in the text?
- 2 How do the children use to spend the evening before going to bed?
- 3 Why does Paul wake up after being asleep for a long time?
- 4 What can he hear coming from downstairs?
- 5 What overwhelms the human shouting?
- 6 What is the children's mood?
- 7 What is the sudden silence accompanied by?
- 8 What role do the children play in this scene?
- 9 Where do the noises of the text come from? What are they caused by?
- 10 What role do the woman and the tree have? Why?
- 11 What is the noise of the wind compared to? What is the wind symbol of?

COMPETENCE: PRODUCING A WRITTEN TEXT ON A GIVEN SUBJECT

4 WRITE a 10/12-line paragraph about the following topic: 'How far do Lawrence's linguistic choices affect and highlight the structural elements (setting, characters, plot) of the novel?'